

THE MAKERS OF BRITISH ART

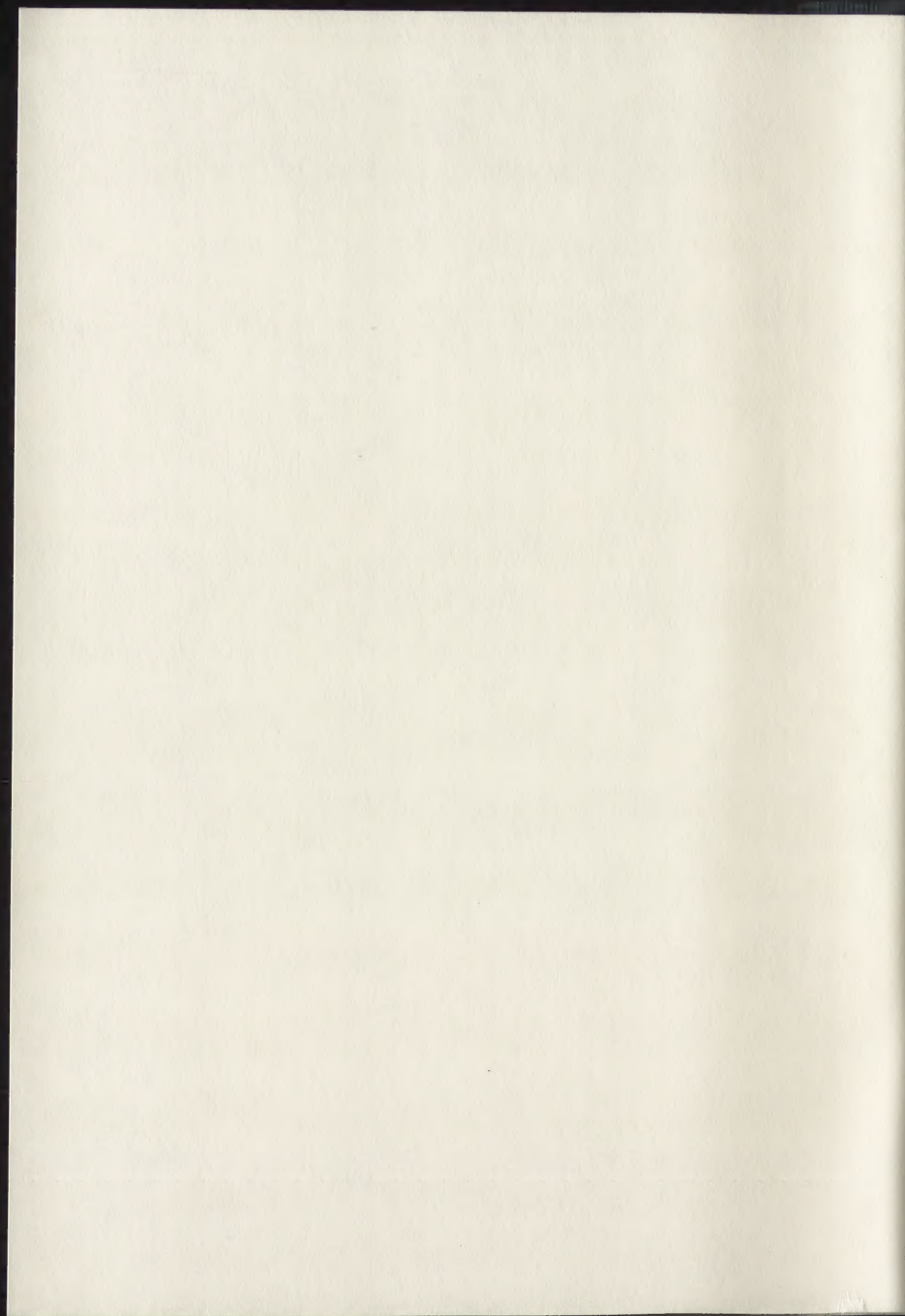
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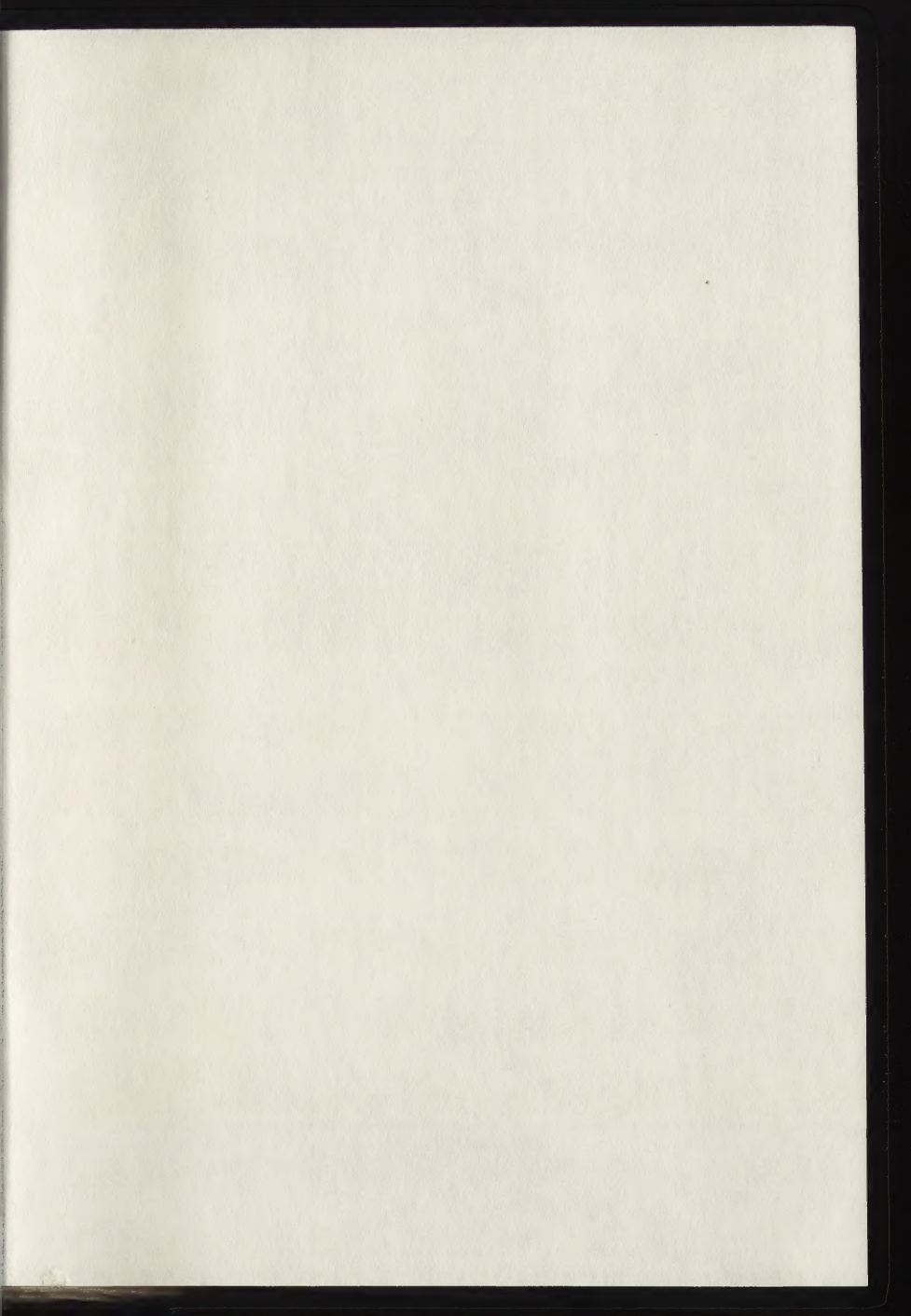
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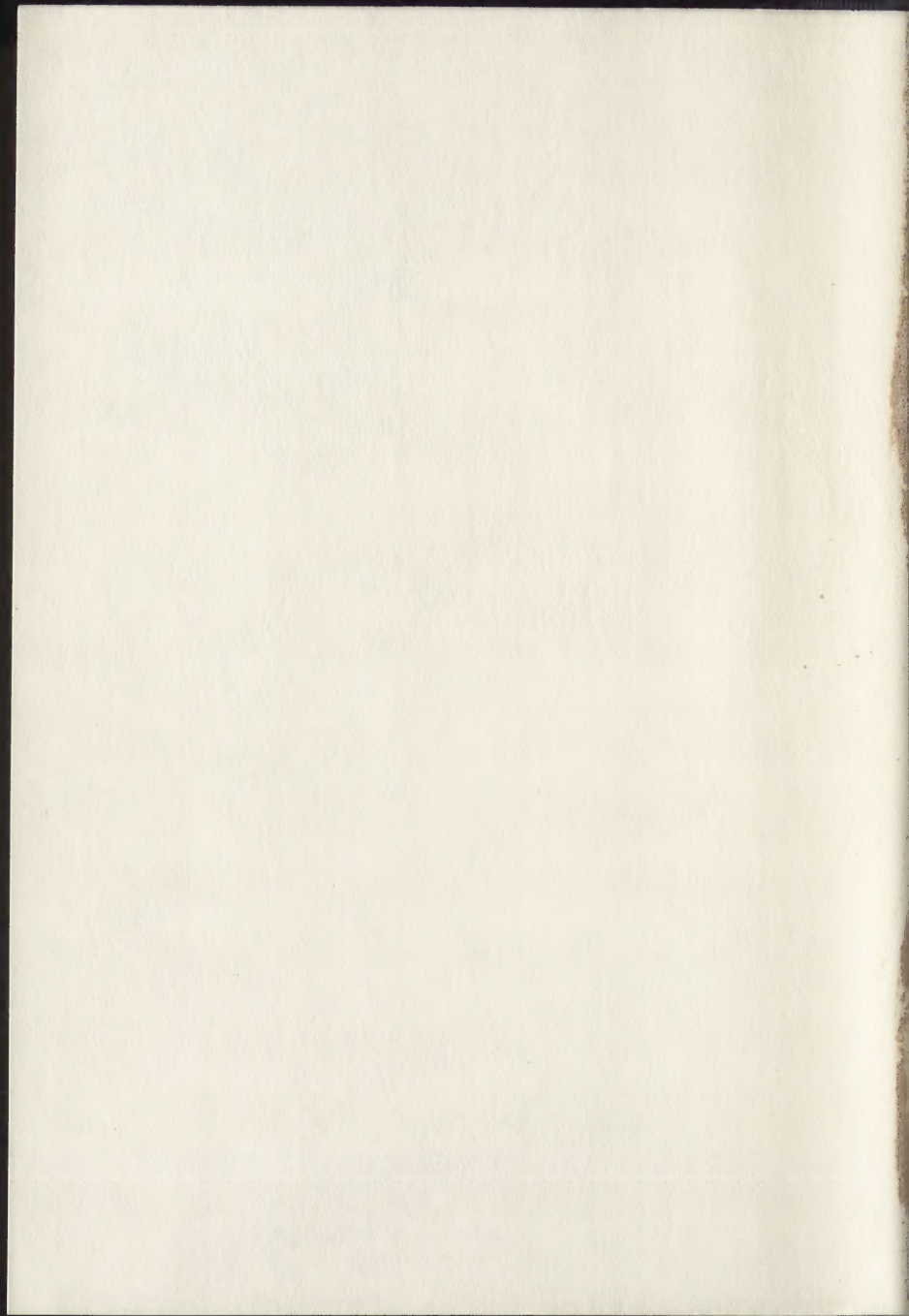


*Why ask for the moon
When we have the stars?*









The Makers of British Art.

EDITED BY JAMES A. MANSON.

RICHARD WILSON, R.A.

The Makers of British Art.

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Emery Walker Ph. Sc.

*Richard Wilson, R.A.
from the original picture by himself
in the Diploma Gallery of the Royal Academy*

175

175





Richard Wilson

R.A.

BY

BEAUMONT FLETCHER

Illustrated with Twenty Plates and a Photogravure
Frontispiece.

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Preface.

THERE are few painters whose lives are of more pathetic interest than the life of Richard Wilson. His fate was to reveal an originality and an exquisiteness in landscape, distinguishing him clearly from his contemporaries, and yet to fail of the fame, no less than the fortune, of every one of his equals. To lay the blame for neglect of him in his own time and in ours upon either prejudice or ignorance, whether on the part of the public or of connoisseurs, is, of course, the resentful instinct felt by all Wilson's admirers who, like Constable before them, to-day "think of his fate, think of his magnificence."

Such requital as this, however, on Wilson's time and on posterity—familiar as it may be from the few writings which have appeared about him—cannot satisfy the biographer, a main part of whose purpose is to regard the personality as well as the art of the artist. Wilson's poverty and his want of general, loudly-acclaimed approval, were undoubtedly the result in a

Richard Wilson, R.A.

large measure of his art, but in no inconsiderable measure also of his personality. It is by establishing the relationship between the personal and the artistic factor that I account in these pages for the resulting product, the peculiar critical attitude which is not even yet quite decided as to the real merit of Wilson.

On this account of the matter the little fame and less fortune of Wilson would seem not unrelated; his "fate," in fact, to use again the touching phrase of the Master I have already cited, is, inversely speaking, just the measure of his "magnificence."

One direct consequence of this inverse ratio of Wilson's fame to his greatness is, of course, the dearth of information of an immediately personal character available for the use of the biographer. While this is so, however, one consolation that the biographer is entitled to is that he may fairly credit himself with whatever fresh item, however small in itself, he has added to, or old error he has removed, from the existing accounts of Wilson.

In the course of inquiries I have made in order to test received statements or to supplement already proved facts about the life of Wilson, I have received much kind assistance, and my acknowledgments in this respect are due especially to Sir John Mark, Leeswood Hall, Mold; the Reverend David Roberts,

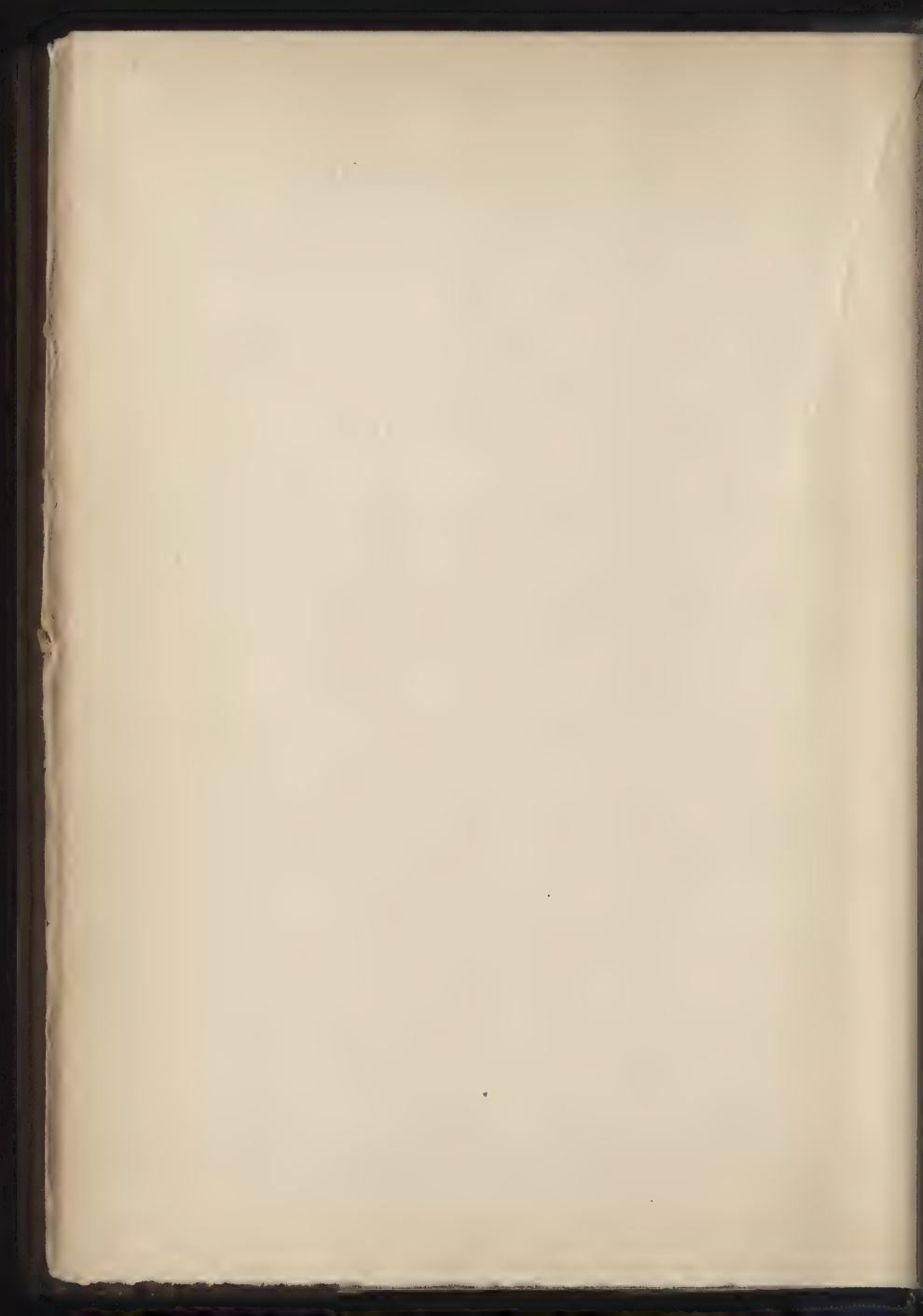
Preface

of Penegoes, Machynlleth (the parish of which Wilson's father was rector, and in which Wilson was born); and Sir Watkin Williams Wynn.

For permission to examine pictures in the possession of private owners I am indebted to Mr. E. H. Marsh and to the Garrick Club, London; while in respect of the reproduction of pictures for the purpose of the illustrations in this volume, I must acknowledge especially the courtesy of the authorities of the National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery, of the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, of the Manchester Art Gallery (the Art Committee of the Manchester Corporation), of the Royal Academy, and of the British Museum. Private owners of Wilson's pictures to whom my most cordial thanks are also due are Mr. James Orrock, R.I., and the Reverend Stopford A. Brooke.

BEAUMONT FLETCHER.

January 1908.



Contents.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

	PAGE
Art and nationality—Celtic influence—The Wilson family—Early bent for Art—Taine's view, and Whistler's—"Remoter charm"—The interpretation of Nature—Gloom and grandeur—Tragic beauty—Art as subjective—Ideal truth—Wales and Italy—Rosa, Claude, and Poussin—Zuccarelli—The Father of British landscape - - - - -	I

CHAPTER II.

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES.

Wilson's birthplace—"The power of hills"—Glendower's country—Egwest—"Sentiment of the scene"—Classicism—Impressions of Penegoes—"Cousin Wilson"—Leeswood—An early friend—"Loggerheads" - - - - -	24
--	----

Richard Wilson, R.A.

CHAPTER III.

PAGE

EARLY LIFE IN LONDON.

London and the portraitists—A poetic paradox—Prints of the period—Wilson as portraitist—Love for Nature—Wilson's failure—Development of portraiture—Individualization—Creatures of Society—Alfred Stevens's view—"Judicious Unfinish"—Reynolds—Gainsborough comparison - - 42

CHAPTER IV.

PORTRAITS.

Powerful rivals—Art apprenticeship—Rise of a native school—Wilson as student—Manner of life—Wright's fame—Effect on Wilson—A corrective—Two exceptions—J. H. Mortimer—Britton's criticism—Italian study—At his best—Realism—The last reward - - - - - 61

CHAPTER V.

ITALY.

Italian influence—Friends and advisers—Independence—Pre-Italian period—"Well done, water!"—Niagara—Zuccarelli—Journey to Rome—Vernet and Mengs—Diploma portrait—The Eternal City—Naturalized in antiquity—Objection to "Niobe"—"Mæcenas' Villa"—Impressive treatment—Inimitable in architecture—The learning of his art—The Campagna—Solemn interest - - - - - 85

Contents

CHAPTER VI.

PAGE

THE MIDDLE PERIOD.

Back in London—His Real Métier—The Gipsies—Nemi and the Arno—Other Italian views—Best in composition—British Artists' Exhibition—Dire straits—Prices paid—Few commissions—Lodging to lodging—The pot of porter - - 113

CHAPTER VII.

THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

The R. A.—The Academic style—Nationality in Art—A stylist—Individuality—For charity's sake—Fraternity—The "Turk's Head" Club—Librarian to the R.A. - - - 127

CHAPTER VIII.

LATER LIFE IN LONDON.

Covent Garden—Welsh scenes—A lucky escape—Delight in the open—A favourite haunt—Last London lodging—A pathetic story—Unfitted for success—Hoppner's view—Where Wilson failed—Celtic excess—Haggling with his Majesty—Offence averted—Proper perspective—Caricatures—The last sad scene - - - 139

Richard Wilson, R.A.

CHAPTER IX.

PAGE

WILSON'S PLACE IN ART.

Father of British landscape—A mistaken challenge—Seeing and feeling—Subjectivity and Objectivity—Actual landscape—Not a popular painter—Generous fellow-artists—Prevalent opinion—The true note—Entirely original—"The English Claude"—Steeped in antiquity—Ennobling treatment—Strange misconception—Unequal work—The final tribute	- 161
--	-------

APPENDIX I.—Authorities Consulted	- 187
" II.—Wilson's Pictures in Public Galleries	- 189
" III.—Wilson's Pictures in the Auction-room	- 192
" IV.—Reproductions of Wilson's Pictures	- 199
INDEX	- 201

List of Illustrations.

RICHARD WILSON, R.A.	<i>Frontispiece</i>
After the Portrait by himself in the Diploma Gallery of the Royal Academy.	
"THE TWO PRINCES AND THEIR TUTOR"	<i>To face page 24</i>
After the Original in the National Portrait Gallery, London.	
"MÆCENAS' VILLA"	32
After the Original in the National Gallery, London.	
"A VIEW IN ITALY"	40
After the Original in the National Gallery, London.	
"J. H. MORTIMER, A.R.A."	48
After the Original in the Gibson Gallery of the Royal Academy.	
"CEYX AND ALCYONE"	56
After the Engraving by William Woollett.	
"CICERO AT HIS VILLA"	64
After the Engraving by William Woollett.	
"MELEAGER"	72
After the Engraving by Richard Earlom.	

Richard Wilson, R.A.

"NIOBE"	<i>To face page 80</i>
After the Original in the National Gallery, London.	
"RIVER SCENE WITH RUINS"	88
After the Original in the National Gallery, London.	
"SOLITUDE"	96
After the Original in the Collection of James Orrock, Esq.	
"A RUIN IN ITALY"	104
After the Original in the National Gallery, London	
"APOLLO AND THE SEASONS"	112
After the Engraving by William Woollett.	
"LANDSCAPE COMPOSITION"	120
After the Original in the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington.	
"VIEW ON THE WYE"	128
After the Original in the National Gallery, London	
"SNOWDON"	136
After the Original in the Art Gallery of the City of Manchester, by permission of the Corporation.	
"LAKE AVERNUS"	144
After the Original in the National Gallery, London.	
"LAKE NEMI"	152
After the Original in the Collection of James Orrock, Esq.	

List of Illustrations

"ENGLISH LANDSCAPE" *To face page 160*

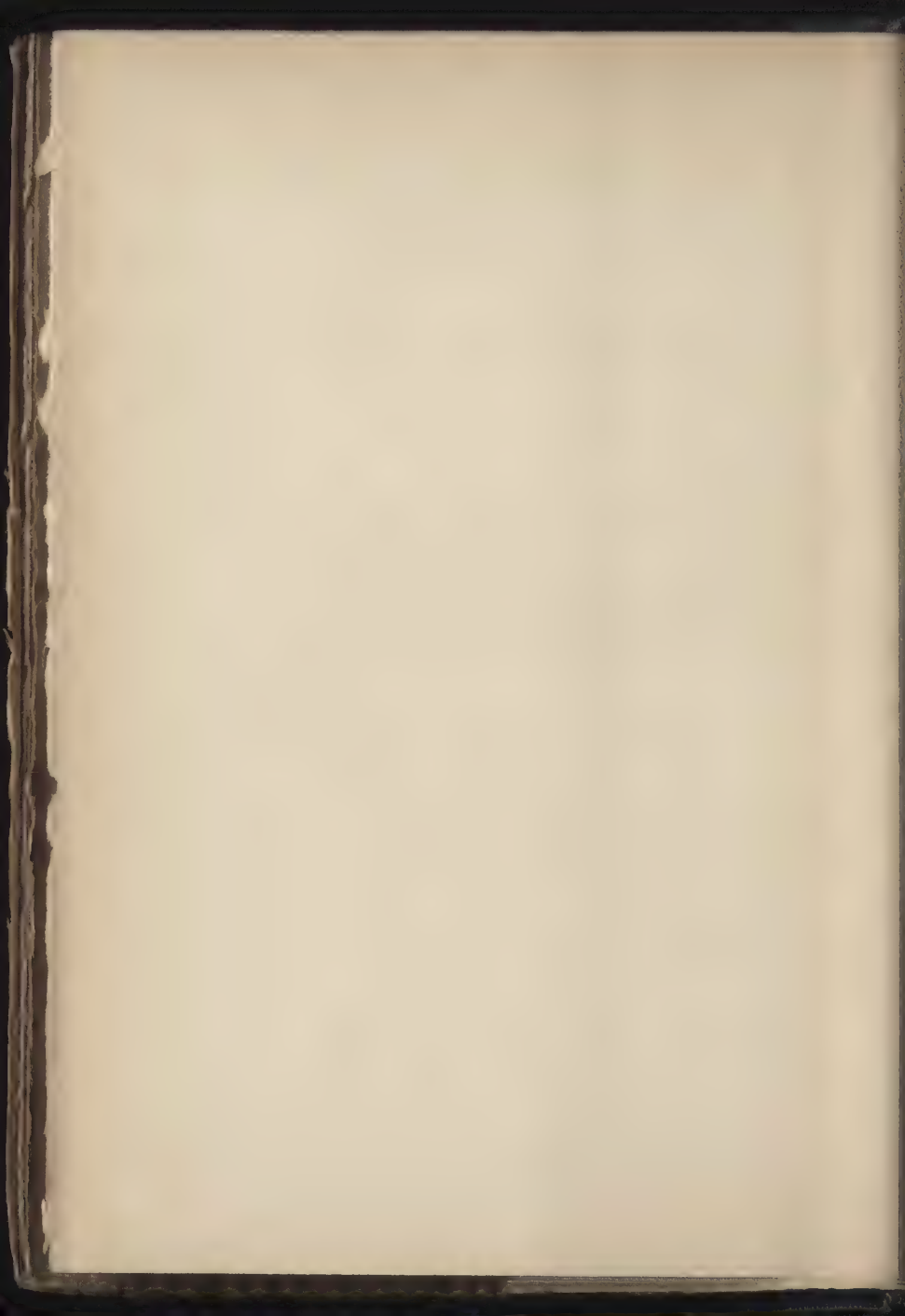
After the Original in the Collection of the Rev.
Stopford Brooke.

"BRIDGE OF AUGUSTUS AT RIMINI" „ 168

After the Original in the Collection of James Orrock,
Esq.

"RIVER SCENE, WITH CASTLE" „ 176

After the Original in the Victoria and Albert Museum,
South Kensington.



Richard Wilson, R.A.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Art and nationality—Celtic influence—The Wilson family—Early bent for Art—Taine's view, and Whistler's—"Remoter charm"—The interpretation of Nature—Gloom and grandeur—Tragic beauty—Art as subjective—Ideal truth—Wales and Italy—Rosa, Claude, and Poussin—Zuccarelli—The Father of British landscape.

IN Art, it has been said, there is no such thing as nationality. Art is art; and we might just as well talk, we are told, about English mathematics as about English painting.¹

*Art and
Nationality*

If this were true, it would be vain to seek for any special significance in the fact that the father of British landscape, as Richard Wilson has been sometimes called, happened to be a Welshman. In the precise form in which it is made, however, this well-known

¹ J. McNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*.

Richard Wilson, R.A.

statement of the independence of Art is much controverted. It might as well be urged, in my own view of the matter, that there is no such thing as personality in Art; and in the sense that Art is not, like Poetry, first and foremost a subjective medium, it would be no doubt true to say this. But that there must be nothing in a picture by which to recognize the painter, no reflection of the man in the style and method of his work, would be an assertion which would simply reduce the matter *ad absurdum*. It cannot be said, certainly, that it is always the part of Art to conceal the artist. Neither ought it to be said, perhaps, that there is not involved in Art a certain reference even further than this. It is impossible not to assign a picture in one's own mind to its particular school or era—just as impossible as to conceive it not to have been painted by a particular painter. It is true, of course, that there is a universality in the appeal of Art in virtue of which it may be said of the painter, as it was said of the Poet, that he is “not of an age, but for all time”; but then, that is not to say that either time or place can be left out of our reckoning in rightly estimating an artist's genius. Nationality is really an important element in æsthetic judgment, because, although we ought in the last resort to apply to the artist the classic saying about the actor, *Totus mundus agit*

The Celt in Art

histrionem ("All the world concerns the actor"), it would appear on reflection that this world-embracing conception of Art admits of different standpoints; and it is in determining these, and in giving the artist his outlook on the world in general, that the characteristic tendencies of his time and country leave their clear mark upon him. It would be absurd to judge of mediævals and moderns from precisely similar notions of the world in general; and in the same way surely racial conditions no less than historical ought broadly to be estimated.

Wilson, then, be it said, was a Welshman. The Welsh, it must be admitted, in spite of their ancient poetry, have been as a people as ineffectual in plastic Art as the Celts in general have been in most things else. Yet so discern-
Celtic Influence
ing a critic as Matthew Arnold could suggest that the blending of the old British spirit with the Saxon basis has given us much that is best, not only in our poetry, but in our painting also. "Here," he tells us in his *Celtic Literature*, indicating the bardic feeling for magic, natural beauty, and inexpressible grace, "is the charm of Reynolds's children and Turner's seas." Reynolds and Turner, however, both happened to be English. If, therefore, the spirit of Welsh tradition, like a far-working spell, had its clear effect on these,

Richard Wilson, R.A.

may it not have wrought also, though in different manner and degree, on the artistic child of Wales, Richard Wilson? The suggestion at any rate is, as Arnold himself might say, worth "trying" a little, and I shall seek to try it accordingly in the present chapter. It may be well first, however, to interpose a few essential facts about the artist himself.

Wilson was born, the son of a clergyman, the Rev. John Wilson, incumbent of the parish, at Penegoes, near Machynlleth, Montgomeryshire, on
The August 1st, 1714. The father, shortly after
Wilson the artist's birth, is said to have been
Family collated to the living of Mold, in Flintshire.

There appears, however, to have been some mistake here. That the Wilson family lived in Mold seems true enough, but the Rev. John Wilson was certainly never vicar there. He died there, and was buried in St. Mary's Churchyard, his grave being still shown next to the altar tomb which marks the resting-place of the artist himself. But instead of being collated to Mold, the Rector of Penegoes probably only retired thither. He had in all five sons and a daughter, the artist being the third son. One of the sons obtained a post as Collector of Customs in Mold, another entered the Church and obtained preferment in Ireland. Yet another is said to have become a tobacconist; while the

Wynnes of Leeswood

remaining one was very early and sadly accounted for. He met his death in infancy; a mound of earth on which he was playing fell upon him and buried him. As for the artist's only sister, she became an attendant on Lady Sandown, Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Caroline, and it was probably through her influence that in his portrait period Wilson had some little share of Court patronage for his painting. None of the children of the Rev. John Wilson ever married.

Probably the reason for the withdrawal of the Wilson family from Penegoes to Mold is to be found, not in the father's position as a clergyman, but in the mother's connection with the Flintshire borough. Mrs. John Wilson was one of the famous family of Wynne of Leeswood, Mold, a family claiming royal origin. The name of the family is of old renown in Wales, and in the eighteenth century the Wynnes of Leeswood were specially noted. Leeswood Hall, the seat connected with the family in Richard Wilson's lifetime, is still standing. It has since been tenanted by other families than that of the Wynnes; but it is still, in its unimpaired magnificence, an admired example of the "stately homes" of an architecturally stately period.

Very early Wilson's bent for Art seems to have been strongly developed, and the parental walls, it is said,

Richard Wilson, R.A.

soon attested his skill, many crude designs being traced upon them by the young lad by means of a charred stick. Though it was as a landscape-painter that he was destined to be famous, these *Early Bent for Art* early efforts of his were devoted to figures, and it was in the drawing of heads particularly that he first achieved distinctive excellence. Nevertheless, the magnificent scenery in the midst of which his life began and ended wrought not less strongly because secretly upon him, while in his blood, no doubt, through his relationship to the Wynnes, the power of Wales was from the first upon him in a more mysterious manner still.

It is unfortunate that we have scarcely even so much as a glimpse of Wilson's mother. Her maiden name is really all that is known of her. No conclusion, therefore, as to her share of the influence in the formation and development of her son's genius and character can be more than suggested, though from her birth and breeding it would seem that she had just those qualities which are among the first essentials of the artistic nature. A high state of refinement—grace, sense, and sensibility—is characteristic of Art as well as of woman; and Richard Wilson's Art, in spite of its power and boldness, certainly does no violence to these feminine qualities. His painting has soul and intellect;

Artist's Mother

and if, as has been asserted, it is true that amongst the progenitors of any artist, in the artistic sense, is, generally speaking, to be found a woman, then it seems that the woman who had most influence on Wilson was no other than his mother. Wilson's manly feeling is consistent with an art-skill seldom associated with such pictures as "Niobe"—which is perhaps his best-known painting—and yet readily apparent in a number of smaller gem-like pictures of the more gentle scenery of both England and Italy, and in some most exquisite pencil work. This whole question, however, of the influence of parentage might very easily be exaggerated. So, no doubt, might the influence of nationality, to which I referred at the outset.

But to resume the discussion—since I think it important to bear in mind that Wilson, although the father of English landscape, was not Saxon but Celtic—it appears that the view of Art already alluded to as, in Whistler's conception, independent of race and country, is but a contradictory attitude to that of the French critic, Taine, and therefore just as exaggerated. Taine, perhaps, has made claims for nationality which are not wholly in reason; but if, on the other hand, it be seriously said that considerations of birth and blood need not be reckoned at all among the formative in-

*Taine's
View, and
Whistler's*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

fluences of artists generally—and the bare statement in question may be made to bear that construction—the proposition is one which, outside of Art, would hardly deserve disproving. But in painting, at any rate, there are certain cognate theories in connection with which the statement calls for attention. The root of the matter appears to be in the doctrine that “subject” in pictures is of no importance æsthetically. A good picture, it is claimed, should be capable of pleasing simply *as a picture*, independently of the interests which may be supposed to attach to the particular thing represented. This is a view of Art which has gained no little prominence. But at the same time it has, as currently expressed in the maxim “Art is art,” been effectively refuted by the most illustrious of its very exponents. A good portrait, Whistler has in effect admitted, is not merely a good picture. It shows a great deal more than the mere outward appearance which the subject happened to wear at the time the picture was painted. By his touch the artist can reveal the springs of hidden character: he can and should portray the soul as well as paint the features of the person who sits to him. His work, in other words, involves a reference to something extra-pictorial.

Now, it is surely here, in this connection, that the consideration of race or nation is apt to enter. Some

Seeing and Creating

such influence, at once personal and impalpable, is bound to come into play as the painter gives to his canvas that

“remoter charm
Unborrowed from the eye”

which makes up this extra and yet proper significance of portrait-painting. The artist, it is to be remembered, is not a copyist. He must first see, it is true, the actual object before him; but then his power of seeing is largely dependent on his power of creating; for without a determining desire for representation his habit of observation would not, perhaps, go very far—just as in poetry, on Wordsworth’s principle,

“Minds that have little to confer
Find little to perceive.”

What the painter perceives is seen in his reproductions to be recast and heightened and stamped with the mark of his individual genius. The same subject, therefore, is differently treated by different artists, and in almost every case the special quality of the picture gives some indication of the personality of the painter. Between the grace of a Reynolds, for example, and the charm of a Gainsborough there is all the difference in portraiture that we know to have existed in the dispositions of the

Richard Wilson, R.A.

two men. The minute power of Reynolds over the nicer varieties of facial expression suggests his intimacy with Society; whereas in Gainsborough a less detailed gift in the handling of visage, and still more his preference for landscape-painting, seem to speak the attitude towards men and women of one who had very little of the social propensity of the cultured President.

If, then, personal contrasts are thus clearly apparent in the work of painters of the same era and country, how much broader must be the effect of racial, historical, and geographical differences!

The truth is we can never wholly dissociate the artist from his environment, but must almost of necessity consider his genius in relation to the forces which have helped to shape him and his contemporaries; and amongst these influences the part played by racial or national elements is always clear and considerable.

There obviously is, in all Art, something more than the beauty of pictorial elements harmoniously ordered.

Interpreta- Something over and above the mere visual
tion of impression belongs to landscape no less
Nature than to portraiture. The artist not only
sees but interprets what he sees; and he
has certainly no less scope for his personal feelings in
scenery than for a sympathetic handling of the human
countenance. The love of Nature in her manifold

Nature's Interpreter

aspects implies the varied play of the imaginative sympathies in direct accordance with the varying phases of the artist's moods and emotions. However faithful the painter is, and must be, to the outward forms of things and to their actual aspect under certain effects of colour and lighting, the things themselves are, after all, or at any rate may be, simply natural symbols for his own thoughts and sentiments.

This interpretation of Nature in her symbolical aspect is, relatively speaking, as much a part of Art as it is of Poetry. We may even apply to the painter some of the language of poetry, and say that he, too, in his imagination is "made one with Nature," in the sense that truth to Nature in the scene he delineates may be transformed to the truth of his own mind and temperament. His own subjective personality may, in other words, become a medium in which the artist beholds the scene before him; and personality is in many cases simply the tensest expression of nationality.

Now, in the work of Richard Wilson this reference to his personality, and thence indirectly to his nationality, is easily gathered. There is one especial quality of his genius which makes the process inevitable. Artistically it has been objected to him that he seemed to invest the whole of the visible universe with the gloom and

*Gloom and
Grandeur*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

grandeur of his own powerful conception of the slaughter of Niobe's children; and the statement is so far true that it applies in a broad sense to some of his finest landscapes, and serves to convey a hint of his personal attitude. It is, however, made with little discernment. It suggests a certain tragicality in Wilson's work; whereas his Art even in its grandest and most solemn phases was by no means a theatrical display of moodiness, as is here half insinuated. His grandeur consists in nothing so much as in his simplicity. Wilson might indeed be called a tragic genius, but not in the melodramatic sense. Temperamentally it may well be that Nature appeared to him more responsive when convulsed and threatening than when calm and alluring; but this personal attitude, which is always subject to the restraint of an art remarkable often for its very delicacy, has a much deeper significance than that of mere pictorial lyrism. Its broad truth is writ large upon his canvases, large almost as Art can write it. But it is no fault of Art if clearer perceptions of an artist's work may at times be had by better acquaintance with his life; and Wilson's life should make clear the sources of his inspiration. He was emphatically a Welshman, and his biography ought to show that in his Celtic affinities lies the inner significance both of his success and failure.

Relationship of Race

Discerning thus in Wilson's genius some of the tragic picturesqueness of the Celtic peoples—their feeling for beauty, their disposition to melancholy proceeding out of their idealism, their splendid striving and strange ineffectualness—we shall not be overestimating some of the effects of race on such a master artist; while if biography goes thus hand in hand with criticism, it will not be criticism certainly that will be the loser. Though the exact relationship of Art to considerations connected with the personality of artists can never, of course, be quite accurately stated, yet the attempt to reduce it to intelligible terms is not by any means useless. That such a relationship exists is pretty generally granted, and the criticism based upon the recognition of it is in strict accordance with the view of Art which the present volume involves; the view, namely, that in the highest Art there is implied a reference which, while it conveys the inner truth of the picture, is in itself quite extra-pictorial. The discerning critic of Wilson must on this view take cognizance both of personal character and racial affinities.

*Tragic
Beauty*

It may be well here to set forth at large the principles of this critical attitude.

Art—even the arts of form and colour—cannot deal entirely with external relations, since the sense-

Richard Wilson, R.A.

perception of outward beauty, however agreeable it may be in itself, becomes infinitely more so when it is regarded as related to some subjective element. Truth
Art as to externals is undoubtedly the painter's
Subjective province; but, equally certainly, imitation is not. The habit of observation, which is the first essential of artistic representation, is acquired by the artist by

“the power of a peculiar eye,”

rather than by the function of the ordinary organ of objective vision. This is so because Nature's truth is rather latent than expressed; and this latent truth the painter, like the poet, can only fully realize by his distinctive power of divination. The highest function of landscape is to *divine* the truth of Nature by the application of a second sight to whatever the eye has first faithfully recorded. It is in virtue of nothing more mysterious than the scientific law of the association of ideas that this is possible. Psychologically the mind is ill-contented with the perception of form and colour as immediately reported to it, and therefore seeks satisfaction in its own inter-relations of sense with sentiment. But though this be the explanation of the actual process of divination, the effect of the exercise of that process is always allied to illusion. Art, so far from stripping Nature of her mystery as Science strips

Soul of Scenery

her, serves rather to add to it. Thus it is that each natural object—tree, or cloud, or rock, or river—not only retains when reproduced by the artist its realistic resemblances, but becomes transfigured and, as it were, invested with “remoter charm.” To the most perfect accuracy in the observation of external phenomena succeeds the suggestion of an inner meaning or “soul” of scenery, and it is by the illumining power of intellectual and emotional insight, by the interpretations given to the reports of the senses in the light of previous impressions and correlated notions, that this suggestion takes meaning. That meaning must vary with the individual observer. Every artist must select the moment at which Nature appears to him to be most responsive—when she is awake and speaking to him. Whether her voice be but an echo of his own voice, or be the expression, as in the poetry of Wordsworth, of an indwelling spirit in Nature herself, distinct from and yet responsive to, the human spirit, matters little in Art; it is enough for the artist if the response of Nature be clearly given. Art, as Millet says, has language; and this language must be heard speaking to us, in all its wondrous variety of tone and accent, of

“That type of perfect in the mind”

which, according to the poet,

“In Nature we can nowhere find.”

Richard Wilson, R.A.

But that this ideal truth to Nature—however illusory—must be ultimately traceable to a personal element in

Ideal

the painter seems clear from the diversity of mind and temperament in different artists.

Truth

One cannot, indeed, always lay one's finger on the predominating quality of this idealism in any particular painter and then point to its source, with equal certainty, in some general trait of the time and country to which he belonged; but one may, at the least—and in fact invariably does—comprehend the genius of each of the greatest artists, considered in its entirety, in relation to all that is known of him, biographically and historically. We habitually associate with Turner's landscapes and seascapes, for instance,

“The light that never was on sea or land,”

and do we not really come to believe, in doing so, that it was a kind of personal, mystical faith with Turner that, as he is said to have exclaimed,

“The sun, the sun is God!”

And as it is with Turner's light, so is it also with Rembrandt's darkness. In each case the peculiar mystery of the prevailing quality of artistic beauty is reflected by Nature from the personality of the painter.

Response of Nature

Is not the notion of his native North, with its dim skies and mist-laden atmosphere, half-consciously suggested in the tone gradations which we instinctively associate with the art of the Dutchman?

On the same principle, when we think of the work of Richard Wilson, it is partly to his native Wales and whatever elements of the Celtic tradition may have been his moral inheritance, and partly also to Italy, the classic land of his artistic nurture, that we should look for the sources of his vital power—for his sympathetic insight into those phases of Nature in which she appeared to him to be most truly herself.

It is for this reason that it has seemed necessary to deal here at length with the rather exaggerated claims which are sometimes made for the "independence" of Art. Whatever worth there may be on purely critical grounds in such a maxim as that "Art is art"—and there clearly is a great gain in eliminating any really irrelevant matter from artistic judgment—the principle is not one which can be very generally admitted from the point of view of biography, or indeed from the point of view of the general interest in Art, inasmuch as it would restrict æsthetic taste to purely formal criticism, and leave out of account the much wider appeal which many of the greatest pictures assuredly

Richard Wilson, R.A.

exercise. To consider every picture simply *as* a picture would be sometimes to miss the proper aim of criticism. We are more likely to find the painter's

"Veritable stature out,
Erect, sublime—the measure of a man,"

by reference to the relationship—as far as possible—between the man and his work.

In the case of Wilson, this consideration is almost bound to overshadow even the most formal criticism. Few writers have been able to appraise his works at their right value in Art without at the same time admitting an appeal to sympathetic consideration on personal grounds. "Poor Wilson!" is with most critics of his pictures as irresistible an exclamation as it is fervent; and the reference it involves to the pathetic story of his life seems not unrelated to the "solemn tenour" of his tone.

It is in this particular quality that the artistic truth of Wilson's landscape—the truth reflected from his own intimate feelings for external Nature—*Rosa, Claude, and Poussin* very largely consists. Wilson, no more than any other artist, could escape entirely from his own shadow, but in him especially the habit of

"seeing himself in all he saw"

imparts to his pictures the ideal suggestion of a

Solemnity

“Penseroso” of landscape-painting. His subjective being, through the medium of his art, becomes vocal of that melancholy which so peculiarly befits an artistic inheritance from the Celt and the Latin. Wilson’s pictures have often been compared with those of Salvator Rosa, Claude, and Poussin, who in their several ways and degrees were inheritors, like him, of the traditions of Italy, and to a certain extent his exemplars in them; but on any particular point of the comparison—whether his wild grandeur remind us of the art of Rosa, or his ærial effects recall the beautiful poetry of space and air in Claude, or whether, again, his contrasting quality of fresh, warm colouring serve to heighten his resemblance in other respects to the learned Poussin—Wilson stands alone, while apart from these his special excellences, the characteristic of his work as a whole, that which serves to distinguish him from his foreign predecessors, is more than anything else his air of solemnity. This is the quality which reveals his individuality. It is accounted for partly by his Celtic temperament and partly by his impressions of classic Italy.

How it was that Italy should have wrought on his mind with a higher degree of personal impressiveness than on the minds of his forerunners is just capable of explanation. Wilson’s peculiar solemnity is not

Richard Wilson, R.A.

entirely the melancholy characteristic of the Celtic people or of Celtic Art, so that perhaps it is in the first place to the influence of Italy rather than to that of Wales that we ought to attribute it. But if Italy impressed him in some of her aspects more profoundly than she impressed Rosa, or Claude, or Poussin, it was because Wilson's temperament was the more amenable to certain kinds of impressions which Italy had to offer. The difference is partly racial, partly historical. Wilson was a Celt, whilst his predecessors were Latins. While his temperament had in it a decided dash of the Celtic idealism, his genius, owing to his position in an England which as yet knew not landscape, was made melancholy by the knowledge of his originality and isolation. Wilson was the "father of English landscape"; and perhaps his very knowledge of his position in Art, added to his racial idealism and intensity, may have tended to predispose him to the contemplation, when he went to Italy, of all that was grand and gloomy in that ever-during, ever-crumbling country.

His sojourn there was not in vain. It was not merely out of deference to artistic fashion that he resolved to study there. The story commonly told of his meeting with Zuccarelli in Venice would make it appear that his genius for land-

Beauty of Decay

scape was somewhat suddenly revealed to him, and that his resolution was as suddenly formed of persevering with it. It is said that he was waiting once in Zuccarelli's studio, and was so impressed with the scene unfolded before him through the studio window that he set to work to reproduce his impression in artistic shape. When Zuccarelli at last entered, he was so struck with the picture that he advised Wilson to devote himself in future entirely to landscape. The advice, if given, was certainly not neglected; but it is, to say the least, improbable that the subject of Zuccarelli's generous praises was Wilson's first or even his most considerable early achievement in this direction. A more likely theory is that Wilson had discovered his powers as a landscape-painter before he went to Italy, and that he made the journey thither for the set purpose of developing them. There he would naturally have turned to find the fullest response to his sense of the awe and majesty of Nature. The beauty of decay had prepossessed him. How far this presentiment of his own lot in life was removed from morbid theatricalism has been already shown. It may, however, be repeated that such an attitude to Nature as that of Wilson at his best is not personal only. It reveals his individuality in a remoter relationship. While there are in his greatest landscapes a grace and grandeur that could

Richard Wilson, R.A.

only properly have been taught by Italy, these probably would not have been taught him with such effect had it not been for his Celtism. The ultimate source of his inspiration was undoubtedly Wales. On whom, indeed, except a Celt, should Italian scenery and Italian memories have wrought the spell they wrought on Richard Wilson? Look at the whole history of Celtism. What has it been but one passionate tragedy! The Celtic spirit has been universally ineffectual. Its futile striving may be seen consciously reflected here and there in individuals in temperamental touches of poignant pathos. "They went forth to the war," sang the bard Ossian, "but they always fell"; and it is with something of this sense of frustrate heroism that one recalls the tragedy of Wilson's struggles as an artist. It is in his very greatness that that tragedy lies. Wilson was not only great but in a sense too great. In pictures like "Niobe" he certainly exceeded his proper powers. The subject was too ambitious for him. And a certain mental attitude, giving an appearance of elevation, even in more modest efforts, suggests a similar tendency. For, in spite of a very great deal of perfect, modest achievement, Wilson cannot be said to have been wholly contented. Futile striving—the endeavour to reach an unattainable excellence—does this not, indeed, suggest the Celt in him?

Services to Landscape

Yet that he should have achieved so much in an art in which Celtic genius has as a whole achieved so very little, speaks much for his art. Wilson personally had every sign of what Matthew Arnold took to be characteristic of the Celtic nature and the Celtic ineffectualness—a disposition to impatience, to revolt, as it were, against the inherent despotism of things. In his private opinions he was unaccommodating and uncompromising; and though he would endure a joke, he could not bear to be contradicted. Yet as an artist he was restrained enough, notwithstanding his bias towards classical subjects, not only to observe Nature accurately, but to study her patiently and represent her faithfully. Although a Welshman, it was in him, as Ruskin saw, that the genuine art of landscape really began for England. Even his classicism was genuine; it was a natural medium in which to convey the sense of his native melancholy and grandeur. Although he painted Italian scenery, he was the first British Master who with finished style and power interpreted Nature in accordance with his own “poor eyes and heart”: he was the father of British landscape.

*The
Father
of British
Landscape*

CHAPTER II.

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES.

Wilson's birthplace—"The power of hills"—Glendower's country—
Egwest—"Sentiment of the scene"—Classicism—Impressions of
Penegoes—"Cousin Wilson"—Leeswood—An early friend—
"Loggerheads."

For an artist of highly original genius a mountainous
country seems the most suitable birthplace. As William
Blake sings—

Wilson's
Birthplace "Great things are done when men and
mountains meet";

and one of the greatest things ever done in Art was the
work which Richard Wilson, who was a child of the
mountains, did for British landscape. Wilson was
born, as already stated, among the mountains of
Wales, at Penegoes, near Machynlleth in Montgomery-
shire, and he seems to have brought to his work as the
father of British landscape some of the spirit of the
scenery of his native district.

Mountains, it is interesting to reflect, were the source
of most that was real and original in the thought and



"The Two Princes and their Tutor" (p. 82).



Return to Nature

sentiment about outward nature in Wilson's era. That era is for ever associated, philosophically, with the name of Rousseau. He it was who inspired what we must still call, a little mechanically, the return to Nature; and he it was who, more than any one else, at last taught the idea that mountains were beautiful. Had the world never learned that, Art as well as Philosophy might have been still in bondage to artificial conceptions.

Not that Richard Wilson, or any other of the early landscapists, was directly influenced by the deliberate study of mountains. It was the change of attitude to these forms of nature which was the most powerful factor in bringing about the new and truer conceptions which Art came to embody with respect to Nature generally. British landscape art was founded on sincere meditative love involving a feeling of close kinship with nature; and as long as the grandest of all natural forms could be simply regarded as awful, such a kinship was impossible.

In opposition to Rousseau, Chateaubriand asserted that the Alps were ugly; and perhaps it was only to be expected that the "virtuous citizen's" enthusiasm would excite a counter-feeling somewhere. Indeed, the rapidity with which the return to nature may be said to have pro-

*The Power
of Hills*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

ceeded, as a result of Rousseau's attitude to his own native scenery, is only accurately to be estimated when it is remembered how mountains were still occasionally regarded among Rousseau's contemporaries and even successors. These forms of nature had been looked upon before him as symbols, not of kinship, but of estrangement. The return to nature was for long in need of Wordsworth to inspire it with his proclamation of the "power of hills." It was not until after it had received that watchword that it directly influenced Art, and gave their higher developments alike to Turner's painting and to Shelley's poetry. Even in its early stages, however, the movement was essentially an accompaniment of the growth of a school of British landscape founded on love of nature. Wilson, Gainsborough, and Constable would not have arisen without it, and the movement itself would not have been what it was had it never been recognized that mountains were beautiful.

The ideas about nature which have made landscape possible may be said, accordingly, to have been inspired by mountains. Only Turner, it is true, could ever have dared to deal directly with great mountain scenery, but indirectly the British landscapists were all indebted to its influence. Whether they studied abroad, like Richard Wilson, and sought to interpret scenery with

Scenery of his Birthplace

an eye to the grand and classical, or were content to confine themselves, like Gainsborough and Constable, to the much narrower area of their own native shores, with no other desire than to impart to their pictures the simplest charm of rusticity, their art was equally founded on their personality and on nature. They felt anew for the various kinds of scenery which they severally depicted what Jean Jacques Rousseau first felt for mountains.

No part of Britain, therefore, could have been better calculated to inspire the work of a "father" of landscape painting than wild, mountainous Wales. Nor could any part of Wales have been better fitted to be Richard Wilson's birthplace than the immediate neighbourhood of Machynlleth. Alike in its scenery and its associations, this district of Montgomeryshire is well worthy of Wilson. The forms of the mountains are often bold and striking; and though the country generally is not sufficiently diversified—notwithstanding that it is watered by a river—it is nevertheless of impressive if not picturesque appearance. It has that breadth of perspective and that air of dignity which are among the finest characteristics of a typical Wilson landscape. It is truly Wilson's country, and accords well with his character no less than with his genius. *Glendower's Country* Machynlleth

Richard Wilson, R.A.

is the place where Owen Glendower was crowned, and where he summoned his Parliament; and in this "bare-foot rascal," as indignant English lords described him, who maintained his rebellion so long and so ably, it is perhaps no mere fancy which would trace just a suggestion of Wilson's struggle as an artist. For Wilson was ever a fighter for independence, and was as free from servility to other people's ideas in his art as in his life. If he was not exactly a Glendower of painting, he resembled at all events the Glendower of poetry, if not of history; and it is no stretch of imagination which would make him say of himself, with the Welsh hero in Shakespeare—

"These signs have marked me extraordinary,
And all the courses of my life do show
I am not in the rôle of common men."

His country's traditions as well as scenery might well have lent him some such strain of moral grandeur.

Egwest His actual birthplace, Penegoes, is too near to Machynlleth not to have shared in its history. It is distant only a mile and a half and, though only a village attached to the Union and Hundred of Machynlleth, is full of romantic interest and has plenty of pride of its own. The name has been spelt alternately Pen-egwest, and the place is

Machynlleth and Mold

supposed to commemorate a Welsh sovereign, Egwest, who, tradition says, met his death by beheading at a spot near where the Church of St. Cadfarch, of which Wilson's father was rector, stood. Another hero of the place is the bard Llywarch Hên, who, in his day, was to his native country what another singer of Celtic origin was to "Ierne" later. He was, as Shelley said of Tom Moore and Ireland,

"the sweetest lyrist of her saddest wrong ;"

for, overcome with grief at the misfortunes caused by the Saxon conquerors, he at last sought the refuge of an ancient house called Dôl Guog, in Penegoes, and there soothed with song his own and his country's woes.

It is on account of the sentiments which these local legends inspire that I consider Wilson's pictures to be more reminiscent of this part of the country than of his later home at Mold in Flintshire. Wilson was quite a child at the time that his father quitted Penegoes and removed to Mold, but though it was in the North of Wales that he would therefore first have looked on any kind of scenery with an idea of reproducing it, still his natural sympathies seem to have taken him unconsciously back to Machynlleth. His power of assigning to scenery some appropriate sentiment is a marked

Richard Wilson, R.A.

feature of his genius, and this may well appear to have been an inheritance from his birthplace. Just as the touch of stern realism which is found in some of the scenery of East Anglia and in certain phases of its history appears subdued in Gainsborough into that tender melancholy which pervades all that artist's work in landscape, so the spirit of Celtism, embodied in Welsh tradition and Welsh scenery, spread its glamour over Wilson and gave him a feeling for nature surpassing that for any mere picturesqueness in her outward forms and aspects.

This was the source, undoubtedly, of Wilson's turn for style. As one of his earliest biographers (Allan Cunningham) says in one of the best, if "Senti- briefest, of Wilson monographs ever ment of the Scene." written, he never painted a picture as though he intended it for a "district survey." Wilson selected and grouped his scenes, and, what is more, interpreted them and gave them a higher unity than that resulting from his composition and arrangement, by infusing into them what, to quote again from Cunningham, "the skilful in Art call the sentiment of the scene."

No scenery, therefore, could have been better suited to him than that of his native district. The place teems with the sentiments which best befitted his

Genius Loci

pictures. It was, as already explained, reserved for Italy to provide the fullest field for the free play of his feelings as a painter of grand and heroic landscape; but what Italy matured in him Wales first implanted; and in respect of this, his artistic inheritance, he was therefore fortunate in his birthplace. Not less, however, was the debt he owed to his parentage. His father, the worthy rector of Penegoes, has been quaintly described in early memoirs of Wilson as a "respectable" clergyman—a gentleman passing rich, no doubt, on something more than the modest stipend of the village preacher whom Goldsmith immortalized, and yet modest enough, perhaps, in this, as in all things else, to attract little attention from any wider quarter than that of his own little parish. Yet, though unrenowned, he appears to have been not only a scholar but a man of sense; and his third son, Richard, whose education he undertook himself, soon acquired from him a knowledge of the ancient classics which stood him later, as an artist, in the best possible stead.

Perhaps on other than artistic grounds it might have been well for Wilson if his taste for the classics had been less real than it was. Had he taken the advice of a deputation of his fellow-*Classicists* artists, who instructed one of their number to go and tell him candidly that if he hoped for success he must

Richard Wilson, R.A.

adopt a lighter style in landscape, or had he persevered with his earlier portrait-painting, he might have attained to that affluence which, as it was, he could only despise as one of the surest marks of artistic mediocrity. Instead of taking the advice which the deputation offered him, Wilson only treated it with whole-hearted contempt, and it seems difficult now not to admire his resentment. His very sincerity was bound to dispose him to irritation at such criticism. It is a plain and painful comment on the state of classical culture—the only culture which, in literature, the age professed to care for—that in Art the painter of the story of “Ceyx and Alcyone” should have been reduced to accepting in return for the picture representing that legend a pot of porter and the remains of a Stilton. Another view of the incident is that the “Ceyx and Alcyone” was painted *from*, not *for*, the pot of porter and the Stilton, the two objects being disposed as models in such a way as to suggest the form and colours required. Perhaps, however, the neglect and indifference which Wilson’s classical sympathies met with were, after all, only an application to learning generally of the well-known saying of Novalis about philosophy. Wilson’s art and learning certainly baked him no, or very little, bread.

Yet his nature, cast as it was in the heroic mould,



"Mæcenat's Villa" p. 103).



Assured of Fame

was, in spite of an apparently irascible temper, always equal to the sacrifices imposed upon it. In spite of many bickerings, he was never merely a cynic. He despaired often of fortune, but never of fame; and though in the midst of his privations he may well have envied the lot of mere journeymen or galley slaves, doing daily the dullest of duties, and yet daily assured of their bodily sustenance, he no doubt felt in his deeper musings that in his devotion to Art he had, after all, a much truer contentment. Could he not afford, for the sake of the future which awaited him, to despise other men's opinions and therefore other men's fortunes? His high Celtic nature would alone have prompted him to reply affirmatively.

But however high and however Celtic, Wilson's nature was still only human. Of his many sorrows, a peculiarly human one was the thought of the contrast between his sordid surroundings and the better condition of things which by his birth and upbringing he might easily have expected. In his lonely lodgings in London the recollection of home and family must have reproached him bitterly even while it soothed him. The rectory house at Penegoes was too early quitted to have formed part of his memories; but just as the scenes surrounding it affected his painting without his knowing it, the

*Impres-
sions of
Penegoes*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

pretty home which was his birthplace impressed him ever afterwards, albeit unconsciously, like an intimation of that happiness which, Wordsworth tells us, belongs primarily to all of us, but which fades faster and faster from the recollections of all of us as we leave childhood behind.

The house in which he was born is very sweetly situated, with the hills far around it. It is unpretentious, small, but solidly constructed and homely-looking, nestling snugly between its well-kept garden hedges, with green fields about it and some old trees near,—the representatives, it may be, of some which Wilson saw,—which, branching gracefully or springing straightly, recall those of his foregrounds.

The church of which Wilson's father was rector has been since re-built; but, like the older building, it is in thirteenth-century style of Gothic. It is built of stone, and is in the shape of a cross, with square tower in the centre with battlement coping. It is on the site of the church in which the Rev. John Wilson ministered, and is dedicated to St. Cadfarch. The rebuilding has, of course, deprived the place of the charm of direct association with the Wilson family, but this defect has to some extent been repaired by a tablet in the artist's honour which has been erected inside the church by Judge William Evans, of Llanidloes. The old

Earl Camden

register of the church belongs to a period when such documents were kept very carelessly, and several pages of it are now missing, having apparently been cut out. There are several entries by the Rev. John Wilson in the pages still extant, but none recording the baptism of his son Richard. The entry was probably made, therefore, on one of the pages which have disappeared.

Little is known of the artist locally. In the neighbourhood generally he is even less than the "shadow of a mighty name." He is remembered neither for his works nor his family history.

His connections, however, if not his genius, would alone have merited a place for his name in the memory of his countrymen. On both his father's and his mother's side he had relatives distinguished not only for their rank, but for their places in history. Earl Camden, it is interesting to know, always referred to Wilson as "Cousin Wilson." This famous Chancellor was the third son of Chief Justice Sir John Pratt by a second wife, Elizabeth, daughter of the Rev. Hugh Wilson, a Montgomeryshire clergyman, Canon of Bangor. By "Cousin" Wilson Camden possibly may not have meant "first cousin," but it certainly seems that he did; and if so, it follows that the Chancellor's mother, Lady Pratt, *née* Elizabeth Wilson, was sister to the artist's father. From his

Richard Wilson, R.A.

familiar reference to Wilson, Lord Camden, it would seem, was eager to own the relationship, and may have been on terms of personal friendship with him.

If, however, the painter had on his father's side this "boast of heraldry and pomp of power," he had on his mother's side even higher pretensions. Allan Cunningham tells us that the Wynnes of Leeswood were an ancient family, enriched with the blood of kings. They claimed descent from one of the five royal tribes of Cambria, through Rhys ap Tewdwr Mawr, who took upon himself the government of Wales in 1077. The family's best-known representative in the artist's lifetime was, however, simply a country gentleman, Sir George Wynne, Bart., Member of Parliament for Flint. Of this worthy's service in Parliament there is little record, but the colossal scale of his electioneering is not yet forgotten. He was the builder of Leeswood Hall—a fine but sad memorial of his fortune and extravagance,—was created a baronet in 1731, and acquired, according to Gough's *Camden*, a fortune from a lead mine, which in twenty years' time brought him an annual income of £18,000. Had his financial resources been twice as great as they were, however, it seems they would not have stood the fantastic uses to which he applied them. "Sad mausoleum of fugacious wealth!" exclaims Pennant, in a passage describing Leeswood

Fugacious Wealth

Hall in his famous *Tour in Wales*, published in 1779, and the exclamation seems amply justified. The huge profits from the mine all disappeared, to quote again from Gough's *Camden*, "in every kind of extravagance." Electioneering, according to this authority, was only an item in Sir George's expenditure. His house of Leeswood, which "stands pleasantly under a hill, with good gardens and a pair of wrought-iron gates, made by the same hand as those at Chirk," was built on a bog which had first to be drained, and the entrance-gates alone must have cost thousands of pounds. It is even said that at the time of their construction the money was not forthcoming, and they were placed in Chancery. However that may be, they were certainly never put to the purpose for which Sir George intended them, but remained useless, albeit magnificent, ornaments. No drive led up from them in Sir George's time to the Hall itself.

Of Leeswood Hall, Pennant gives us a glimpse at a time shortly after the demise of the founder. He describes it as "rising, palace-like, along a fine slope, on the south side of the vale, *Leeswood* surrounded with woods and lawns." The adjoining country, the same writer says, was "a delicious composition of rich land, finely bounded by gentle risings, watered by the Alun, and varied with a

Richard Wilson, R.A.

pretty town and fine church in the middle, with numbers of seats, groves, and well-cultivated farms"—a description which need not be materially modified at the present day.

The exact degree of the relationship of the owner of this "stately home" to Richard Wilson seems by no means certain, but it was a fairly close one. Sir George was, at all events, personally acquainted with the artist and his family, and took an interest in him. Indeed, admirers of Wilson owe the spendthrift baronet some little gratitude, since it was through his influence that the painter, then a lad in his sixteenth year, was taken up to London and placed with an artist in order to follow his studies.

This is Sir George's true memorial. His reputation in other respects seems hardly enviable. It is not known how he obtained his baronetcy. On a scale, however, with his other extravagances, is the presentation which he is supposed to have made to George II. of a hundred fine oxen, and it is just possible that the title may have been conferred by his Majesty in return for this munificence.

Sir George entered Parliament for the borough of Flint in 1727, on a double return, by separate indentures, with one Salisbury Lloyd. Both members were, however, on petition, taken off the file. Lloyd then

Sir George Wynne

proved successful, and retained the seat till his death in 1734, when Sir George again contested and won it, his opponent this time being Sir John Glynne, founder of Hawarden Castle. The expenses of this second contest are said to have amounted altogether to £70,000, equally divided between the candidates. There was, as in Sir George's previous election in 1727, a petition lodged, but the successful candidate upheld his return, and retained the seat till 1742. He lost it, however, in that year as the result of yet another petition, and there seems little wonder if, by that time, he had been financially ruined. He is said to have died a prisoner for debt in Flint Castle, of which he had once been Constable.

From the fact that Sir George Wynne was closely related to Wilson, and was, in the heyday of his fortune, an early friend to him, it would seem that Leeswood may have been often honoured by the artist's presence. Wilson must, at all events, have been well acquainted from early boyhood with the neighbourhood generally. Some of his scenes in Wales show that the rocky scenery near Mold was often present to his mind. Some landscapes by him still remain in the district—two at Nerquis Hall and one at Colomendie. At the latter place Wilson passed the last years of his life, the then owner of the fine

Richard Wilson, R.A.

mansion-house and park being a relative of his; and there he left at his death, in addition to a number of pictures—some quite unfinished,—his easel and other relics.

One of the most interesting reminiscences of him locally is the story of the "Loggerheads" sign-board.

This, with its quaint device of two heads "Logger- staring and grinning at the rather astonished heads" beholder, is inscribed with the legend "We

three loggerheads," and is commonly said to have been painted by Wilson. The sign, accordingly, has been very carefully preserved, being still fresh-looking on its front, although it may well be that but very little of the original colouring now remains.

Painting of such a description has been done, of course, by other famous artists, as the David Cox sign at Bettws-y-Coed remains to testify; and certainly the fact of having to accept a commission of such a humble character would have been by no means the worst of Richard Wilson's shifts for turning an honest penny. There seems no reason, therefore, to doubt the story. It is uncertain, however, at what time of his life he could have undertaken the work, but it was probably done before he left home for London; before, that is, he had reached the age of sixteen.

Wilson must have revisited Mold on several occa-



"A View in Italy" (p. 108).



Spell of Egwest

sions. This he would have done from professional as well as personal motives; and, in fact, the scenery in this district enters directly into his landscapes. In the lovely grounds of Colomendie several spots are indicated where he is said to have delighted to sit and paint or sketch. While, however, this part of the country must be allowed to have provided him with actual studies for landscapes, it cannot, I think, be said to have influenced him in respect of his attitude to Nature generally more than his native Penegoes. It is with especial reference to the ideas and sentiments embodied in Celtic tradition that the work of Wilson, considered in its entirety, assumes special significance; and while Mold provided him, in not a few of his paintings, with just the kind of objects—rocks, woods, and waters, with stately buildings appearing at intervals—which would at once have impelled him to take out his brushes, the ultimate source of such impulse must be sought, I think, in the spell which was over him from the Glendower country. For, unknown to himself, this had been woven around him from the very hour of his birth in the little village of Egwest.

CHAPTER III.

EARLY LIFE IN LONDON.

London and the portraitists—A poetic paradox—Prints of the period—Wilson as portraitist—Love for Nature—Wilson's failure—Development of portraiture—Individualization—Creatures of Society—Alfred Stevens's view—"Judicious Unfinish"—Reynolds-Gainsborough comparison.

It was in 1729 that Wilson, then in his sixteenth year, found his way up to London. Thither, then as now, though not in quite the same proportions, *London and the Portraitists* there were drawn in a constant stream from all parts of the provinces the most diverse elements in the social life of the nation; and it is no wonder, therefore, if the great painters of the period—Hogarth, Wilson, Reynolds, and Gainsborough—not only studied in London, but found some of the themes of their maturer genius there. Nowhere, assuredly, could they have found these more readily. All, in their several ways and degrees, became portrait-painters; and no better

Town and Country

opportunities, in this branch of their profession, could have been wished for by any of them, however various their talents, than those which the towns afforded during the reigns of the Georges. The delineation of countenances is indeed a debt which Art owes, in general, to the great centres of population in most ages and countries, since it is in the cities, of course, that the study of faces is most varied and most intricate; but as regards portraiture in England, the debt due to London during the eighteenth century is wholly exceptional. There is in the work of Reynolds, and the art of the portraitists generally, something suggesting the capital at a time when life in the capital made for grace and refinement, just as in the work of Wilson or Gainsborough in landscape there is something recalling the beauty of Wilson's or Gainsborough's birthplace. Indeed, in respect of the influence each may claim to have exercised on the one or the other of the two branches of painting, London, Wales, and East Anglia contend for honour with one another; and it might be even possible for æsthetic prejudices in favour of portraiture or landscape to bring home in Art something of the same antithesis between town and country as Cowper expressed in poetry.

If, however, it were sought to apply the dictum that

"God made the country and man made the town"

Richard Wilson, R.A.

to explain that the source of landscape was divine in
A Poetic its nature, while that of portraiture was no
Paradox more than human, the effect would be to
make Cowper's poetry contradict the canon
of a later and saner poet, who declared that

"Whoso writes good poetry, looks just to Art;"

for to "look just to Art" would be just what Cowper's paradox—good poetry as it may be—would certainly not do, supposing he had in mind, at the time when he wrote it, the debt of Art to the town, especially London, in the period immediately preceding him. There was no doubt much in the town, in that day as in this, that was not exactly divine in its genesis; but there was, nevertheless, in its varied social aspects, in its dominant type of faces, its prevailing customs and costumes, plenty of inspiration for portrait-painters. Never before or after has any city in the world had quite the same attractiveness. There was a charm attaching to the time in spite of many drawbacks. The streets were noisy, dirty, inconvenient, and, after nightfall, positively dangerous. Places of amusement were few and inaccessible to great numbers of people, and the only kind of society to be had by citizens away from their homes was that provided by the various coffee-houses, or, for people of rank and fortune, by the

Georgian London

fashionable promenade in St. James's Park. Vauxhall was, it is true, a place of great resort, but Ranelagh was not opened until 1742. The only means of locomotion, the coach and sedan-chair, which seem attractive nowadays, were not always so to those who had perforce to use them; while those curious relics, the iron torch-extinguishers which are still to be seen affixed to the railings of some of the older houses in the West of London—in St. James's Square, for example—show how crude provision was made for travelling at night-time. As for the protection accorded to life and property, the novels of Fielding afford some amusing comments, showing that *Dogberry* and *Verges*, had they been sketched from the watchmen of Fielding's day instead of Shakespeare's, would not exactly have been caricatures. Yet, in spite of all, London in the early part of the eighteenth century could not have been very different from what it was at the beginning of the nineteenth century when it had attraction enough to make Charles Lamb say, in declining an invitation which Wordsworth sent him to pay a visit to the Lake district, that he preferred to stay by the "sweet shady side of Pall Mall."

Many prints of the period representing promenaders in the Mall in St. James's Park, show that in point of costume eccentricity had not the vogue in London

Richard Wilson, R.A.

before 1750 which it enjoyed later under the Macaroni régime. The *tête*, as the fashionable headdress used to be called, was not worn so high as to require the use of a ladder to enable the hairdresser to reach it; ladies' hoops were not as yet so wide as to suggest the idea represented by a later caricaturist that the wearers got into their coaches by being let down into them, through the opened roof. As early as Steele and the *Tatler* hoops were, of course, condemned as nuisances; but they were until well on in the eighteenth century only moderately-sized, and as long as they remained so, the rest of the costume was all in keeping, consisting of short skirt, low-cut bodice, and flat "milkmaid" hat.

As for the men's attire, before 1750 there was equally little to lend itself to the idea of caricature, the most extravagant fancy being that of the heavy tie-wig with big butterfly-bow, full-skirted coat, and three-cornered hat carried, not on the head, but under the arm. There was nothing, therefore, in the social life of London at the time when Wilson made his acquaintance with it to make the Puritan change of a century later from silk and satin into sober broadcloth a really welcome movement from the point of view of artistic enthusiasm for what Ruskin calls "the external aspect

Golden Age of Portraiture

of the human form and its immediate accessories." But all the artistic possibilities which lay latent in the capital at that particular period cannot be fully explained merely by outward circumstances. It is the inner history of the period which accounts for the opportunities then existing in London for portrait-painting—opportunities which even Wilson, born landscapist as he was, could no more resist, when he first entered his profession, than could Reynolds or Gainsborough.

Wilson's work as a portraitist was, at its best, inferior; but it is on that account a foil to his fine qualities as a landscapist, and, if for this reason only, it will be instructive to look at the circumstances in which the portrait art of Sir Joshua and of Wilson's rival in landscape, Gainsborough, grew to such sudden perfection. The fact that Wilson's portraits are now almost forgotten, while the fame of both of his contemporaries depends in the one case wholly and in the other case largely—some might even say mainly—on this kind of pictures, shows at once the limitation and the extent of Wilson's genius. Although born with those wonderful painter-like qualities which are apparent at once in his landscapes, he could not attain in portraiture to a more than mediocre level, at a time when conditions generally

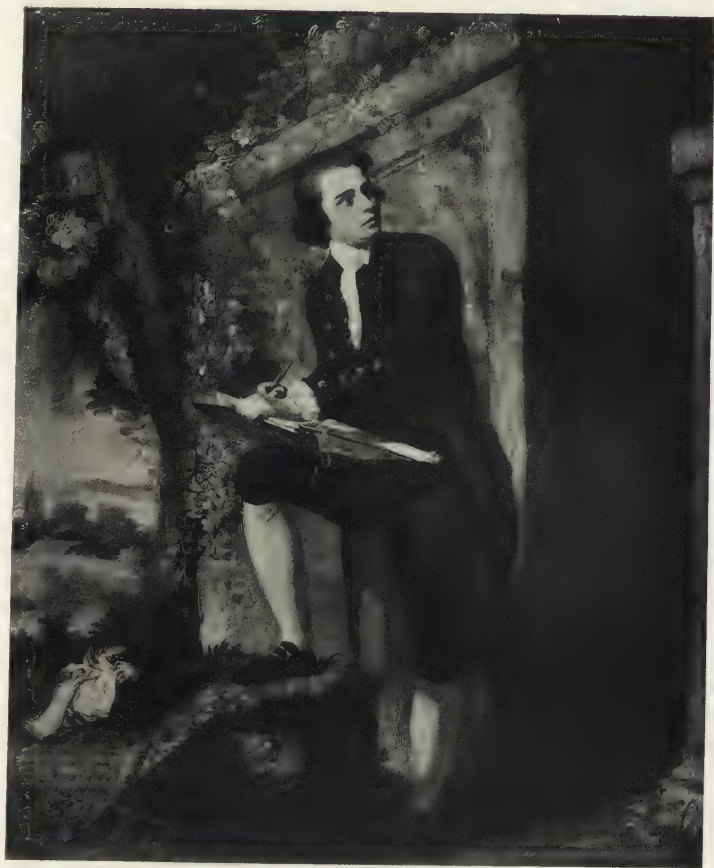
*Wilson as
Portraitist*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

were so peculiarly favourable to that branch of Art as to enable the other Masters to give it its highest development. The fact is evidence enough of the real source of his inspiration. That source undoubtedly lay away in Wales ; and while the social London of the elegant Georgian era left its happy reflex in the faces of men and women as depicted by Reynolds and Gainsborough, Wilson's native scenery, working its spell upon him, turned him away from the city and its living human influences and led him to seek the response to his own imaginative spirit in those wild, romantic and beautiful phases of external nature to which the art of Rosa, Claude, and the Poussins had, in different ways and degrees, responded before him.

Temperamentally, Wilson was hardly a townsman ; he had certain human antipathies bespeaking all too plainly his absorbing love for Nature, and the result was that, artistically, he was as ill at ease with countenances as he was, socially, with the owners of them. It was, however, natural that he should have tried his hand at portraits, and even, to some extent, succeeded with them. From the fact that he was admitted at Court, and had the honour of painting King George III. (as Prince of Wales), with the Duke of York and their tutor, Dr. Ayscough, and from the fact that other known portraits by him include

*Love for
Nature*



"J. H. Mortimer, A.R.A." (pp. 73-80).



Day of Omen

those of a marquis, in the person of the Minister Rockingham, a high naval officer in the person of Admiral Smith, known to notoriety as "Tom of Ten Thousand," and a then famous artist, J. H. Mortimer, it would seem that he enjoyed for a time a fairly extensive practice as a portraitist. Yet Wilson was too true an artist to allow success to cajole him, and he no doubt saw for himself where his limitations lay, even while in the enjoyment of prosperity.

But in order to see his limitations nowadays—to see how signally he failed of his opportunities in portraiture—it is necessary to look at the circumstances in a way in which Wilson himself could not have looked at them. A glance back at his time will give the proper perspective in which to judge his portraits as compared with those of his rivals.

*Wilson's
Failure*

Wilson chanced to be born, not a little significantly—on the day that the world first learned—what the world, to be sure, has not since forgotten—that Queen Anne was dead. August 1st, 1714, was therefore a day of omen for British Art as for British history. With the accession of the House of Hanover a new era was to begin in the political and social system which was not without its effect in many different directions. It had its practical outcome even in painting. The time, first and foremost, was marked by strong individualism;

Richard Wilson, R.A.

and it is this which explains the development, under the Georgian régime, of the art of portrait-painting. In the hands of the first two Georges the royal power was lessened, and that of the political families was largely increased in consequence. The real powers of government were vested in Whig or Tory families, and the same ascendancy amongst individuals became characteristic of Society as of the party system in politics. Society was little more, in fact, than a small and exclusive coterie. As such, however, it represented a kind of survival of the fittest—at least in the artistic if not political sense. There were probably never higher artistic types than there were in England during the time of the Georges, and it was thus that the art of a Reynolds became for the first time possible.

Portrait-painting was, of course, no discovery of the eighteenth century. It was a very much earlier product than that, and it has flourished, too, in times marked by conditions which were more collective in character. But it did not achieve instantly, and certainly not under collective influences, its highest state of perfection. It is not always the case that the arts first in time are the finest in inspiration. When, in an eloquent passage, Hazlitt declared that "those arts which depend on individual genius and incommunicable power

Flower of Portrait-painting

have always leaped from infancy to manhood, from the first rude dawn of invention to their meridian height and dazzling lustre," he simply stated a paradox. It overlooks the facts to say that any of the arts has come suddenly to perfection, or that it has declined in consequence ever afterwards; on the contrary, it will be found that, in respect of the development of the different forms of genius, Bishop Berkeley's lines in the famous quatrain inscribed upon the Senate House at Washington about the course of Empire, hold generally good—

"The first four acts already passed,
The fifth shall close the drama with the day;
Time's noblest offspring is the last."

It is no doubt true that in England the genuine art of portraiture was as sudden a revelation as it was wonderful; but then portrait-painting cannot be said to have been born in England. The proper view of the matter is that it was reserved for the English portrait-painters in the eighteenth century to complete the work of preceding centuries in other countries. This they were able to do as a result of the development which individualism had been undergoing in England in the meantime—a development which, on the Continent, was not nearly so marked.

Richard Wilson, R.A.

Landscape as well as portraiture became subject in England to an individualizing process which had been hitherto unknown on the Continent. In the sense in which we now understand landscape, the art was little appreciated by the mediævalists. It was for long, all over the Continent, either accessory or decorative, and, in either case, conventional. The great advance that was made by the British school of painters was in the direction of Nature, and this was so because they approached Nature for themselves, not always under the same conditions at the same time of the year and even of the day, but in all her variety of moods and phases, according as these appealed to their æsthetic conceptions and personal feelings. They were not, of course, all subjective artists—Wilson, indeed, was distinctly an objective painter;—but it was only by individualizing and representing “effects” in accordance with something that they saw and felt for themselves in Nature, that they wrested her secrets from her. Those “effects” were the result of the appeal made by Nature at responsive moments to their own inmost sympathies; and whether their work was technical, being, as often in Gainsborough, little more than a pretext for subjective expression in line and colour, or whether, as in Richard Wilson, it was more in touch with Nature,

Age of Individualism

being based far more than it was in Gainsborough on truth to outward reality, it was in each case individual.

The English national tendency towards individualism which had its culmination in the eighteenth century thus accounts for the distinction of the British Masters in landscape, and at the same time explains the mystery, to some extent, of their peculiar power in portraiture. The portrait-painter revealed his individuality as well as that of his sitter, and it was thus that the Art of his era received its peculiar charm. Through it we feel a sympathy with the eighteenth century that we feel with no other period. It is the period of "our great-grandmothers," the period of personalities who live vividly before us—more vividly even than Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims can be said to have lived for Dryden, when, in his famous criticism, he observed that in them "we have our forefathers and great grandames all before us. . . . Their general characters are still remaining in mankind; for mankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of nature, though everything is altered." Chaucer's pilgrims, however clearly delineated, were at best like the figures of a Florentine procession picture. They suggest the extensive scenes and crowded canvases of mediæval art—an art which corresponded to an age of collectivism: the single

Richard Wilson, R.A.

representations by the great masters of portraiture are appropriate to an age of individualism.

Yet, even so, they are essentially creatures of Society, those living beings of the Wilson-Reynolds-Gainsborough era. They belong, it is true, to a day when Society was little more than a coterie, when the spread of new ideas of personal freedom and privilege was in the direction of oligarchy rather than democracy, when constitutional government, being as yet in its infancy, was rather negative than positive in effect and character, limiting the royal prerogative rather than giving to the people any proportionate opportunities, and when all that was good, therefore, in the life and thought of the country rose, as it were, to the surface, and seemed to be concentrated in individuals rather than dispersed through the community; and yet, few and favoured as they were, these gorgeous Georgian personages, they are, at least in their portraits, free from their social privileges. Artistically, they resemble the subjects of sculpture in ancient Hellas: the portraits we have of them are not likenesses merely, but types of the life and manners of which the actual personages were only partial embodiments. They were essentially human creatures related to the world around them; and the old masters of portraiture, like the ancient sculptors,

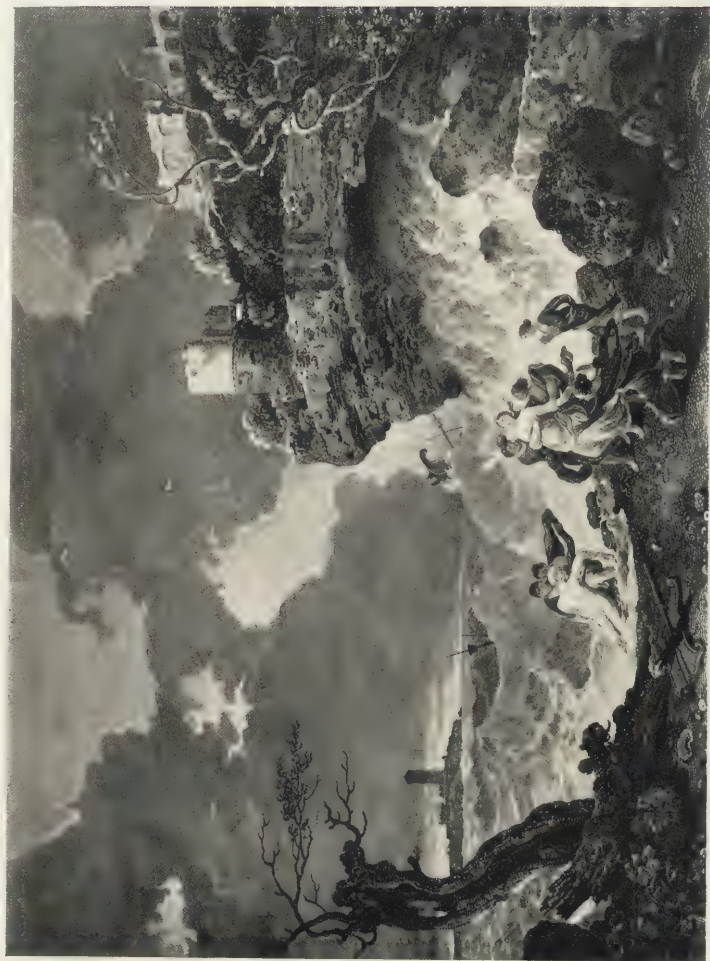
Unconscious Selection

selected and treated their subjects with unconscious reference to a much wider idea than that of reproducing the features immediately presented to them. Each portrait was a presentment, in individualized form, of some dominant type of the men and women of the time; and thus it is that, artistically, the comparatively few personalities in whom the life of the era may be said to have centred convey no suggestion of that strict exclusiveness which attached to them socially. As they are given back to us still from the hand of a Reynolds or a Gainsborough, they are not lords or ladies— notwithstanding that many of them were so in actual title—dwelling in isolation, proud, distant, and repelling; but, on the contrary, the life of each, related as it seems to be, to the life of all, suggests an inter-communion. An all-pervading social sentiment is, paradoxically, the artistic counterpart of the individualist notions prevailing in the time of the Georges, both politically and socially. The art of Reynolds and Gainsborough makes the men and women of their period seem not mere units, but loving and lovable beings. That is because those two painters had not only realized what a much later master of a very different school—Alfred Stevens, the Belgian apostle of *modernité*—describes as at once the goal and supreme difficulty of Art—*faire vivre*,—but had overcome that

Richard Wilson, R.A.

difficulty in the very way which Stevens seems to have specially approved.

Stevens, in his *Impressions sur la Peinture*, has a word of admiration for the French painter Géricault, on the ground that with a single figure he seems to convey the story of the whole of Napoleon's army. Hardly different was the power with which Reynolds and Gainsborough contrived to throw on their canvases something more than the features of a few selected individuals. That any Art can possess such an external reference as to appeal to the play of social sentiments over and above the appeal to the mere material eyesight, might of course be questioned; but among those who might question it, even Whistler himself, with all his well-known militancy against artistic irrelevancies, had, as I have before pointed out, admitted in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* that a painter must do something more than merely put on his canvas a face the model may wear for one particular day. The way in which the masters of portraiture in the eighteenth century met this extra-pictorial requirement of painting was by the very simple expedient of leaving something for the spectator to fill in as he pleased. "Gainsborough's portraits," Reynolds tells us, "were often little more in regard to finishing or determining the form of the



"Ceyx and Alcyone" (p. 121).



Weakness of his Portraits

features than what generally attends the dead colour; but, as he was always attentive to the general effect or whole together, I have often imagined that this unfinished manner contributed even to that striking resemblance for which his portraits were so remarkable."

It was, in short, by the fascination of what Sir Charles Eastlake has called the "judicious unfinish" of a consummate workman that the model was made to give back the life, not only to the eye but to the mind of the spectator. *"Judicious Unfinish"*

The pleasure derived from the portrait is indeed nothing less than one would like to derive from the actual presence of the original; so much is left to the spectator himself that the charm he finds in it is like the charm of conversation, reciprocal.

Now, that is just the charm that Wilson's portraits fail to give; though they seem to have been all good likenesses, they all lack enchantment. They are entirely wanting in mystery. There is truth of resemblance in them, but not truth of reference—of idea, of sentiment. There is nothing left in the representation for thought to play upon. They are not addressed to imagination and sympathy. They convey no suggestion that the originals of them were good company to live with. The particular person represented was a particular

Richard Wilson, R.A.

person only and—"he was nothing more"; not a type and an embodiment of the idea of Georgian England. Wilson had not the power of interpretation in portraiture which he possessed pre-eminently in landscape, and it is not a little significant, as showing the grasp of character which he failed to achieve, that he painted, with only one exception as far as is now known, only portraits of men; whereas the peculiar beauty of the eighteenth-century portraiture generally is in the representation which it gave to the grace of womanhood. One cannot even imagine Wilson painting a girlish countenance; and even could one imagine it, the result, it would seem, would not conduce to the reverie—

What wert thou maid? Thy life, thy name
Oblivion hides in mystery;
Though from thy face my heart could frame
A long, romantic history.

His portraits lack entirely this appeal to the hidden interest in faces. They are more portrait-like than picturesque, more painter-like than poetical. When one has finished praising the truth of drawing and beauty of colouring, one is still far from seeing in a Wilson portrait "the noble vision free" which makes criticism cold, and which therefore suggests, in place of criticism, some much warmer feeling, such as that,

Mind of the Sitter

for instance, of Mrs. Browning before B. R. Haydon's portrait of Wordsworth—

No portrait this with academic *air*,
This is the poet and his poetry.

It seems that Wilson could not address himself to the mind of his sitter, and thus realize in the portrait the living thought of the original as well as the features. In his portrait of "Peg Woffington," for instance—the only woman he is now known to have painted—he cannot, I think, be said to have portrayed the actress as well as the woman. This portrait, which is now in the possession of the Garrick Club, London, shows perhaps better than any other Wilson's essential contrast with both Gainsborough and Reynolds. Gainsborough, in his "Mrs. Siddons," divined with quick sympathy the power of his sitter as an actress no less than her charm and grace as a woman; while Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his conception of her as "The Tragic Muse," portrayed not Mrs. Siddons, but "the living Melpomene." Each picture is an equally wonderful artistic creation, and each is equally different from, and superior to, Wilson's presentment of Woffington. Wilson could neither merge his model in some classic conception, as Sir Joshua could, nor convey the same

*Reynolds-
Gainsborough
Comparison*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

idea in the way that Gainsborough conveyed it—realistically. He was a realistic painter, but could not realize, like Gainsborough, the ideal in the real in his portraits. In his landscapes, on the contrary, it is in nothing so much as in this that he challenges comparison with Gainsborough. No landscape-painter, either before or after him, was more ideal, but at the same time none was more real; none had fewer of Gainsborough's mere "motives" of landscape, but neither had any one more of Gainsborough's impulse to identify himself with scenery, and thus to interpret it according to the appeal it possessed for him personally. No artist has entered into the spirit of scenery more truly than Wilson, and none has ever conveyed that spirit with more thorough regard to the outward embodiment of it in the original scene represented.

CHAPTER IV.

PORTRAITS.

Powerful rivals—Art apprenticeship—Rise of a native school—Wilson as student—Manner of life—Wright's fame—Effect on Wilson—A corrective—Two exceptions—J. H. Mortimer—Britton's criticism—Italian study—At his best—Realism—The last reward.

BORN landscapist as he was, it seems natural to ask why Wilson should have taken to portrait-painting, or having taken to it, why he should have continued to practise it against powerful rivals until well on in his life. The answer has been already indicated. Conditions were favourable to portraiture, and Wilson, albeit reluctantly, was obliged to persevere in it if only from expediency. At first, indeed, he had no alternative. There was practically no demand when he came to London for any other painting, unless perhaps for historical pictures; and except in one or the other of these two branches, he could not have received any regular instruction.

But such instruction as was given at that time in London—the only place in which any instruction was given at all—was certainly not of the best, to judge

Richard Wilson, R.A.

by the great majority of the portraits painted before 1730; but even had it been much better than it was, the results, it seems, would not have been any different. It was rather genius that was wanting than any practical opportunity for the cultivation of it. As Sir Joshua Reynolds said, Art was just about at its lowest ebb; indeed, it could never have been at a very much lower. But this was so because Reynolds himself had not shown his powers. He was still at the time to which he was referring only a student; he was a pupil of the now forgotten Hudson.

The immense distance, however, at which he was destined later to leave his instructor behind him shows at once how little and how much he owed to him. Genius may need very little to aid its early development, but perhaps without that little it would never know any development. Any training, certainly, may be better than none. So it proved at any rate with Richard Wilson.

The only regular way in which Art was studied at the time was the same as that in which the crafts were acquired. There was a kind of apprenticeship system, similar in its main idea to that which obtained in the trades. It suggested rather the early Renaissance than the eighteenth century; but it still survived in Art as in

Art

*Apprentice-
ship*

Master and Pupil

other skilled callings, because Art as a whole was still regarded as related to such other callings. Painters had not as yet achieved the pre-eminence which later distinguished them socially, and there was, in fact, little distinction between them and other craftsmen.

Accordingly, the young aspirant to fame with the brush was generally given in charge of some established practitioner in the particular branch of painting which he desired to cultivate; and he would thus be left to pick up for himself, in his master's studio, whatever wrinkles his observation and practice might make useful to him. Lodgings would as a rule be found for him in the house of some craftsman, and possibly here we may just see a suggestion of a conscious change in the relationship between Art and the crafts. Painters might still regard themselves, metaphorically speaking, as under the same roof with craftsmen, but they began to adopt towards them the same kind of relationship as, for social purposes, the young student in lodgings assumed to the person he lodged with. They condescended to associate with them in so far as it suited their own convenience only.

This perhaps was only natural, since, with the rise of a school of native British painters, the single art of painting was very soon to acquire a very special

Richard Wilson, R.A.

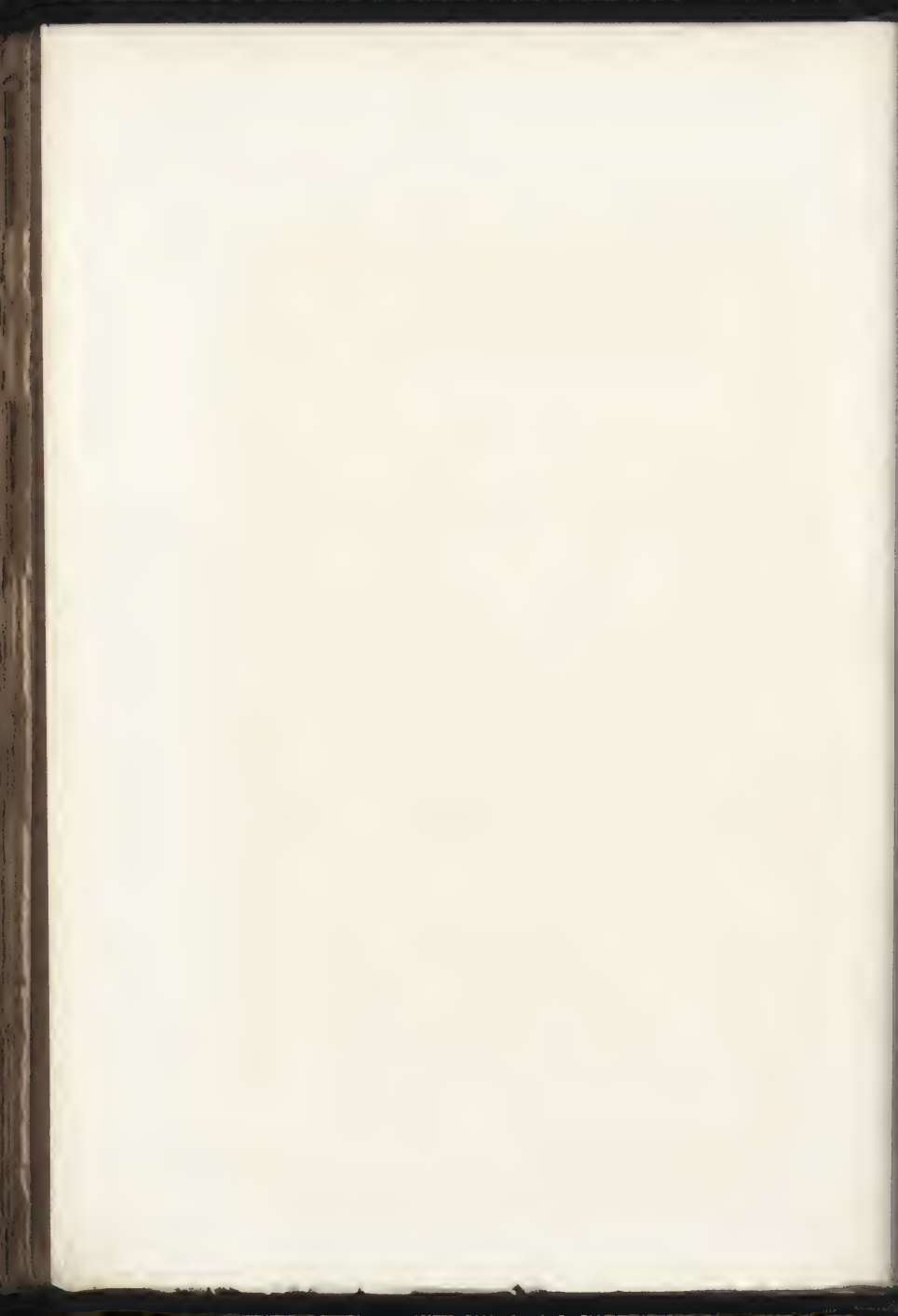
dignity. Moreover, as a legitimate consequence of the increased demand which soon sprang up for regular teaching in painting, the self-esteem of teachers, who happened, of course, to be also practitioners, was very greatly enhanced.

*Rise of a
Native
School*

A new air of dignity began to invest the studio as, in the eyes of its occupant, it became less of a workshop and more of a sanctum; and what was more and more needed, therefore, in response to the new recognition which was now broadly given to the separate interests of practitioners and teachers of the art of painting, was some central academy in which instruction should be imparted by those specially qualified to impart it. By the time that Wilson was ready to begin his studies two notable steps in this direction had in fact been taken. In 1711 Sir Godfrey Kneller had started an institution for giving professional instruction in the art of design; and in 1724, five years before Wilson came up to London, Sir James Thornhill set up his famous school at his house in James Street, Covent Garden. Here Hogarth studied, and, as a romantic consequence, fell in love with and secretly married Sir James's daughter. Some of Thornhill's pupils founded later a school of their own, and made it specially notable by their introduction of drawing from life. This was a great advance in art instruction, but



"Cicero at his Villa."



Arrival in London

the institution itself did not meet with success. It was followed, however, by the St. Martin's Lane Academy, founded by William Shipley, which prospered and held the field for some thirty years. Then, at the end of that period, when the Royal Academy was founded, a stage had at last been reached in which painters could pride themselves that not only were they artists—as indeed were the craftsmen with whom they had formerly been associated—but artists with a difference. Theirs was now a distinctive—ay, and distinguished calling.

Such were the changes which were coming over the profession when Richard Wilson began to prepare himself for his career in London. But, unlike Hogarth before him and Gainsborough after him, he does not appear to have ever entered at the one or the other of the two new schools of painting, either at that of Sir James Thornhill or at William Shipley's establishment in St. Martin's Lane. He may very probably, later in his life, have become acquainted with Hayman, Gainsborough's master, at this latter academy, and may have met Gainsborough himself there, and—as Sir Walter Armstrong thinks—have had some influence on him. Wilson himself, however, belonged, as a student, to the older order of things. When he was brought up to London he was placed with a portrait-painter named Thomas Wright,

*Wilson as
Student*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

and it seems that the only instruction he ever had in painting was what he received in that artist's studio.

Of his life as a student we know absolutely nothing. What his private haunts were, who his companions, what his habits at that very early and impressionable period, must be left entirely to conjecture. He was probably a good-looking youth, straight of form, and fine of feature, for although the general impression of him is that derived from Mengs's portrait, which shows him to be somewhat corpulent, and though the term "red-nosed Wilson" had, towards the close of his life, probably only too much truth in it, still these were epithets which could not always have applied to him. A portrait of himself, in the National Portrait Gallery in London, which was earlier than that in the possession of the Royal Academy, shows that there was, in fact, a time when he was free from both these reproaches—unless, indeed, we are to suppose that in the picture Wilson unduly flattered himself. But at whatever period he may have given bodily evidences of that form of indulgence—the result of neglect—which inclined him all too readily to say to whatever companion happened to call at his lodgings, "I have done enough for one day; come, let us go and take a drop of something," one can well imagine that when he arrived

Thomas Wright

in the capital, full of hope and vigour, and strong in the sense of security in the name, wealth, and influence of his patron and relative, Sir George Wynne, Bart., he was as free as youth can be from all faults of maturity. The fashionable habit of swearing, of accompanying each observation with a robust "Damn you, sir!" or more delicate "Demme!" was probably the worst of the vices which he acquired in London when he first came to live there. He had, however, at all times of his life, when in the society of a few close acquaintances, a touch of jovial good fellowship, and in the days before his temper, embittered by years of poverty and of the indifference of the public, had become morose and irritable, he would have been welcome company wherever refinement was not pushed to an absurdity.

Where his first lodgings were we do not know, but they were probably in or near to Covent Garden, where Wright had his studio.

Of this Wright himself very little is known beyond his name. Had it not been, indeed, for the author of *Anecdotes of Painters*, Edward Edwardes, we should not even know perhaps so much as that; for already in Wilson's lifetime the name had passed into oblivion, and even the industrious anecdotist could only gather this scanty notice:—

Richard Wilson, R.A.

“Thomas Wright, an artist, of whom Mr. Walpole takes not the slightest notice; nor has the author ever met with any mention of him, except what can be found in the inscription under three prints by Gerard Van der Gutch, engraved after cartoons of Guido—‘In the collection of T. Wright, Painter, Covent Garden.’”

It seems, therefore, that had Wilson's master depended solely on merit for his claim to remembrance, even the honour of mention in Edwardes's *Wright's Anecdotes* would have been denied him. As *Fame* it is, however, his claim to fame amounts to this—that he possessed Gutch's prints from some engravings after Guido! We do not even know if any person of note, in an epoch full of rather notable persons, ever sat to him for a portrait; and the only possible suggestion of what his work may have been like—that, too, a matter of pure conjecture—must be sought in the style which distinguished his pupil's portraits. Edwardes tells us, notwithstanding Wright's forgotten reputation, that Wilson acquired such knowledge from him as made him the equal in portraiture of the great majority of his contemporaries. Unfortunately, however, none of the very early work of Wilson has been preserved, and such of the portraits by him as we still possess belong to a date when he had been some years in practice, and had probably shaken

Restraining Influence

off whatever juvenile mannerism may have betrayed his apprenticeship. There is, however, one general characteristic of all Richard Wilson's work which is clearly the result of some restraining influence which was eagerly and carefully exercised. He had in his very nature, as I have shown, a high strain of feeling, and with his love, as a Celt, for grand and heroic sentiment as well as scenery, he would have been more disposed than are perhaps the majority even of the youngest artists, to run into mere extravagances and to attempt the last—in fact the consummate—task of the very greatest painters, that of interpretation, before he had properly mastered the first and most requisite one, that of seeing correctly. How far Wright restrained him is matter of pure conjecture; but that the restraint was there, whether from without or from within, is tolerably obvious. Natural propensity would, on my own view of the matter, have led Wilson to perpetrate, had he not learned better, no end of splendid but all impossible landscapes. I have pointed out that from the first, even in his home in Wales, he showed his skill in figure-drawing; but I have also indicated that I consider that even there his true bent was towards landscape. The mere absence of anything which could be fairly considered a juvenile effort in this direction is significant. When

Richard Wilson, R.A.

Wilson at last indulged his bent he was, as Allan Cunningham states, better prepared to do so than he had, perhaps, imagined he would be; and this is so, not entirely for Cunningham's reason that "he had been long insensibly (while in Wales) storing his mind with the beauties of natural scenery," but for the further reason that he had long been sensibly restraining his desire for representing those beauties.

His term of apprenticeship to an obscure portrait-painter who was probably entirely lacking in any imaginative quality may, indeed, have had *Effect on* this result, that when he turned finally to *Wilson* landscape it was as an earnest student as well as a lover of Nature that he sought to represent her. All that the love of Nature implied for him, with his Celtic temperament and personal scholar-like attitude to romance and sentiment has been already enlarged upon; and from what has been said on the subject it will appear that nothing would have been easier for such a painter as Wilson than to be merely motived in his art and to regard it rather as a reflection of himself than of Nature.

As it is, his choice of scenes in nature is, on the whole, restricted, and he has been often charged with repeating subjects, as if approaching reality on almost every occasion from the same prepossessed standpoint.

Objectivity in Landscape

But however this may be—however few his ideas, and however frequently he asserted them—he is in his representations of them far nearer to Nature than any of his predecessors or contemporaries in any of theirs. It is, in fact, in his earnest study of the reality, as well as his feeling for the symbolism of external nature, that Wilson must succeed at last in wresting from his great rival, Gainsborough, the title of “Father of English Landscape.” Gainsborough, with all his variety, made little advance as compared with the strides which were taken by Wilson, in the direction of bringing landscape into real relation with outward nature inasmuch as his landscapes were, as Ruskin called them, rather “motives of colour and feeling than earnest studies.” Gainsborough, in short, was just as highly a subjective painter as Wilson was objective. Now, Wilson’s objectivity was, I fancy, in large measure, the result of that self-restraint already referred to, which he learned first to practice as a portrait-painter. In portraying faces he had not the temptation towards “seeing himself in all he saw” to quite the same extent as he would have had it in too early attempts at landscape-painting. Nature must often have seemed to him, in his isolation and idealism, more responsive than man; and it is easy to reflect, therefore, that that air of poetry with which he invested his landscapes

Richard Wilson, R.A.

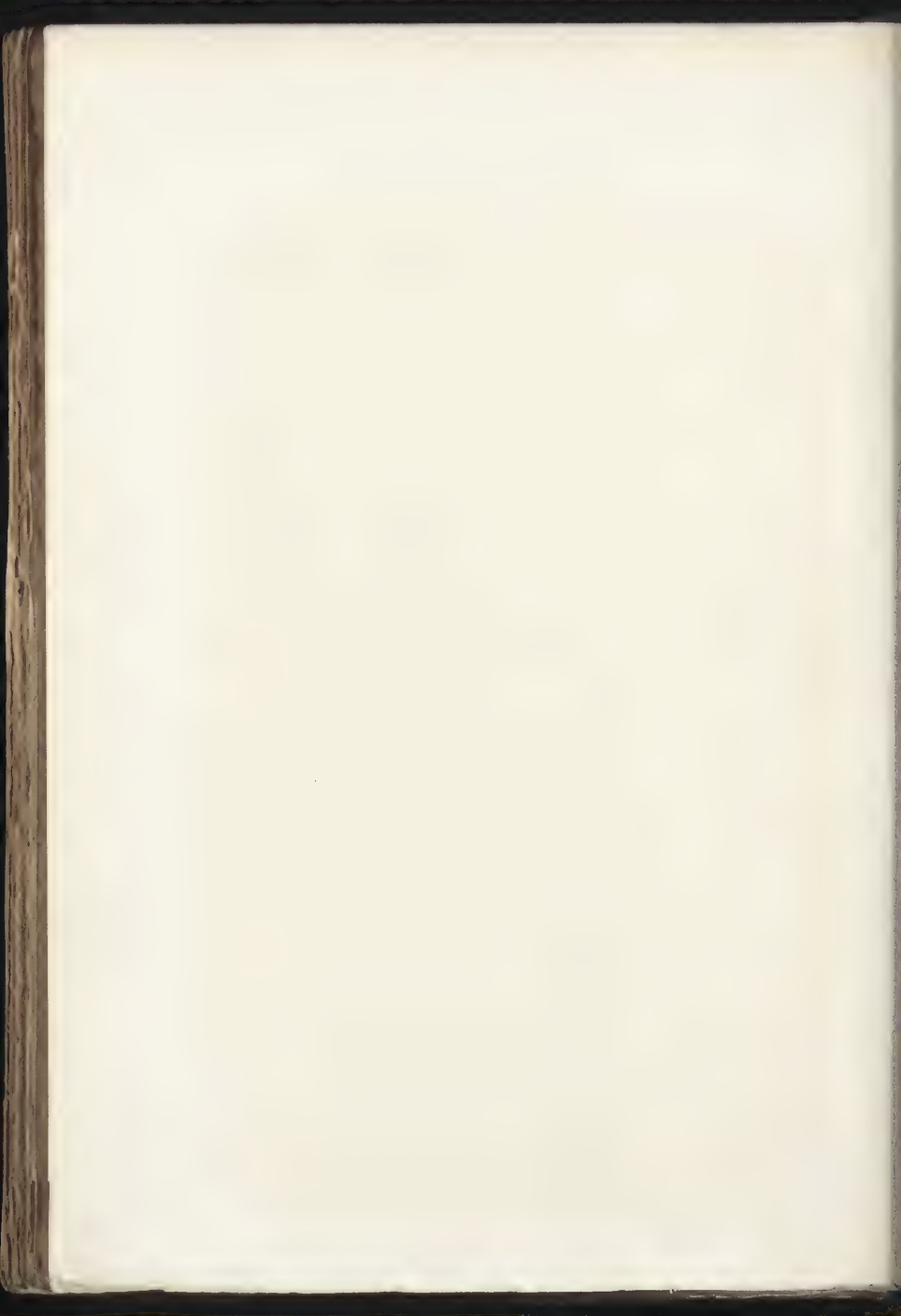
when he came to paint them might have been far less real and less naturalistic a quality than it actually was. Wilson, in fact, was just such an artist as, save for his art, might have "seen himself in all he saw" to the entire exclusion of all else that he saw. He might literally have painted the conviction across his canvases that—

We receive but what we give
And in ourselves alone doth Nature live.

Portrait-painting, however, being—as it seems to have been—entirely uncongenial to him, came in
A sometimes to correct this tendency. It was
Corrective in imagination and insight that he failed conspicuously in portraiture; but it was perhaps just the repression entailed upon him in respect of these qualities by this branch of his art that, by a kind of natural reaction, enabled him to do what he did when he finally abandoned portraiture and took to landscape. Wilson's failure in portraiture is the more remarkable because of the very interesting material which he was privileged to work upon. It is noticeable that only his portraits of distinguished personages have been preserved to us; and perhaps the personages rather than the portraits must, generally speaking, be held to account for this. There are but a dozen known



"Meleager" (p. 111).



Best Portraits

portraits by him in all; but considering that he was nearly forty years before he began to devote himself chiefly to landscape, he must have painted a greater number than that. A good many of his hand have, no doubt, perished for the simple reason that they had not the interest in them which, in the surviving examples, belongs to the subject. These dozen portraits, which are all that I have been able to trace, include, in addition to the four already mentioned, a second portrait of George III. as Prince of Wales, three of the artist himself, one of his friend and adviser, Locke of Norbury, and one of C. F. Abel, the famous German musician, who was a friend of Gainsborough, and who was twice painted by that Master. This last portrait by Wilson is one of the lesser known art treasures of Buckingham Palace. It is not, however, of any purely artistic value.

In two only of his portraits does Wilson seem to have found a fit theme for his powers. These are the picture of J. H. Mortimer, in the Royal Academy, and his own diploma portrait of himself in the same institution. Such limited range as he displayed in portraiture is in itself no detraction from his supreme power as a painter, but it cannot be said that he ever achieved in portraiture such supremacy as in landscape has long made him acknowledged, in the words of Opie, as

Richard Wilson, R.A.

second to no name of any age or country. Opie uttered this eulogy of Wilson as a painter of grand and heroic landscape, and although, as it cannot be too strongly insisted, Wilson is not to be judged by that kind of painting alone, yet such high praise of him from so high a critic goes far to show that even had he confined his powers in landscape, as he confined them in portraiture, to a mere dozen canvases, still each of those dozen, if one reckon amongst them such examples as the "Niobe," "Mæcenæ's Villa," and "Meleager," would alone have conferred on him that distinctive excellence which, as it is, not all his portraits together have given him.

But in the portrait of Mortimer, who was a fellow-artist, Wilson came near to some such excellence; and

J. H. a reason which seems to suggest itself is
Mortimer that there was something in Mortimer which would have appealed to Wilson personally, and which gave him a sympathy and insight not to be found in his other portraits. Mortimer, like Wilson himself, though in much worse degree, was one of the failures of art. The almost complete oblivion which has overtaken him is not, it is true, due to the same conditions as have restricted Wilson to the appreciation of a few, but is rather justly deserved than otherwise. He never developed his powers as Wilson did, and not

Mortimer

only did he show the same imprudent disposition as is often laid to Wilson's charge, but he seems to have neglected his genius for more ignoble indulgences than the numerous pots of porter which, after all, were the "red-nosed" artist's only luxury. According to Edward Edwardes, he pursued "inelegant pleasures," and to be superior as a cricketer or to command on a loose frolic was to him "worth ambition." Yet at one time he had given promise of being in the front rank of his profession. He had studied under Sir Joshua Reynolds's master, Hudson, and afterwards under Sir Joshua himself, and had very early in life beaten Romney for a prize of 100 guineas offered to young competitors by the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, the subject set for competition being "St. Paul converting the Britons." He achieved distinction, however, not only as a painter of historical incident, but as an etcher, and it is in this latter capacity that he showed his affinity to the style of Wilson. His etchings are bold and free, and show in the subjects selected the same sense of the terror and wild grandeur of Nature that in some of Wilson's landscapes suggests the influence of Rosa. Possibly this point of similarity in Mortimer's art to his own may have enabled Wilson to succeed in painting him in the same way as he succeeded—though not to the same extent—in painting landscape. Wilson was, perhaps,

Richard Wilson, R.A.

in sympathy with his material in Mortimer, and so fused into the picture that spirit, born of sympathy, which denotes creative genius.

In 1842, John Britton, the author of the *Fine Arts of the English School*, valued this work by Wilson at 150 guineas; and in a criticism published in the same year he gives Wilson very high praise for it indeed. Twenty years previously the picture had already been pronounced by such an artist as Lawrence, and by such connoisseurs as Prince Hoare and James Christie, to be a "beautiful and truly interesting work of art," and that pronouncement in itself would have been sufficient evidence of the power of Wilson to please as a portraitist—at all events in this example; but Britton, always rather an admirer of Wilson, has in this instance rather exceeded himself in enthusiasm. Yet he has not fallen into mere hyperbole. He describes the picture as a fine, spirited, and faithful portrait of Wilson's friend and fellow-student in art, "whom he has portrayed in a peculiar attitude, supposed to be sketching a statue on a pedestal among woods;" and he further claims for the picture that it is a "genuine, perfect, and extraordinary specimen by the Master," capable of competing with a Titian, a Van Dyck, or a Reynolds.

This is so far true that Wilson is here certainly far

“J. H. Mortimer”

above his usual level in portraiture. The picture is not only interesting, considered simply as a picture, but it marks an important stage in the artist's development. It was painted after his return from Italy, and shows the wonderful effect of his studies there. It may be considered both as a portrait and as a landscape, for the figure is painted standing against the pedestal of a monument, beneath the shadow of trees, and there is a view of open country in the background. Considered in either way, it is a picture well worthy of Wilson. As a piece of figure-drawing it is excellent, and suggests an instructive comment on Wilson's love for this kind of drawing as an aid to effect in landscape. Curiously enough it has been sometimes contended that because Wilson occasionally left the figures in his landscapes to other hands than his own, it was because he felt himself unequal to them. The suggestion, however, is wholly ridiculous; Wilson had a perfect mastery of figure.

It is indeed in the combination of the figure and the architecture with the landscape that this picture of Mortimer excels. Here the effect of Italian study is unmistakable. Wilson's art was brought to perfection in Italy, in each and all of its parts and as a whole, though in the contemplation of the whole, one is apt to forget, of course, that it ever

*Italian
Study*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

had any parts. By the response it afforded, alike in its scenes and its memories, to his native love as a Celt, and to his acquired sympathy as a scholar for the great and grand in Nature and for the romantic in history, Italy wrought on Wilson as only Italy could have wrought. It gave his art as a whole a spontaneity and unity in underlying conception which may well obscure the notion that in its executive aspect it was composed of various elements which had first to be severally elaborated, and then fused and welded into the single, instant and impressive effects of the separate pictures. Every masterpiece of painting bears so much of the suggestion of an inspiration, that it seems to have sprung suddenly into being, and to have been complete and perfect in its very inception; and especially in the case of Wilson, as judged by his landscapes—so impressive is their unity—it seems difficult to think that the several powers displayed, such as drawing, colouring, composition, and arrangement, were all developed separately as the result of study and practice. Yet Wilson, born painter as he was, and highly impressionable as he was in the presence of some kinds of scenery, studied and practised carefully each one of his powers, and just as Italy inspired him and gave him the central motive for his art as a whole, so it also provided him with the means of developing each and all of its details.

Successful Portrait

If there is one particular quality, however, which more than another Wilson owed to Italy, it is his power of colouring. The contrast in this respect between his pictures painted before and those painted during or after his stay in Italy is very closely marked. The portrait of Mortimer is particularly noticeable for its colouring. It is rich but quiet in tone, and has some of Wilson's most characteristic touches. But the most remarkable thing about a truly remarkable picture does not, after all, consist in any of the details: it must lie in the effect as a whole; and here in this portrait of Mortimer, Wilson has shown for once as a portrait-painter that he could keep an eye to the whole as unerring and instant as he kept invariably in landscape.

In general arrangement Wilson is here at his best. He has treated his subject in a most painter-like manner, overcoming in the arrangement, the composition, and the use of light and shade, *At his Best* some most unpromising material. Mortimer was, in his way, a fop; and although an artist, his costumes were not always studied, it would seem, to suit artistic requirements. His unpleasing garb, however, has been here retained by Wilson for the purpose of the portrait without alteration either of its cut or colour. It is indeed on account of its surmounting of the initial difficulties of the costume that Britton accords the

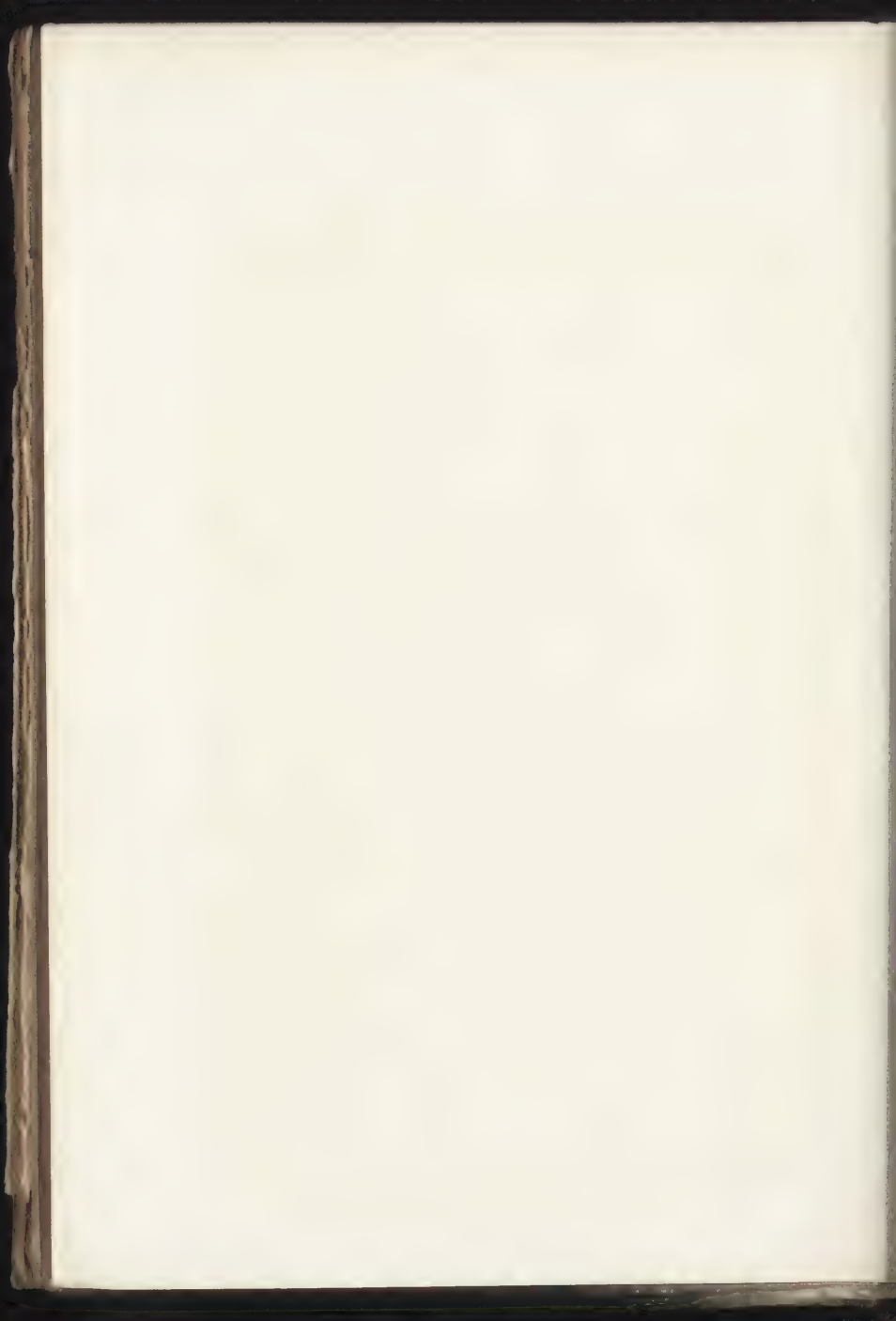
Richard Wilson, R.A.

picture his highest praises, and his observations on this head might have been carried further than the comparison already cited, with Reynolds, Van Dyck, or Titian, at which he has left them. Britton remarks that Wilson has "composed the whole in a way to surmount the difficulties of dress, etc., and has produced a picture to compete with a Reynolds, a Van Dyck, or a Titian." He might much more appropriately have made Wilson's treatment of the costume, with its "hard, forbidding" appearance, the basis of a comparison with Gainsborough. This line of criticism would have been more instructive as showing Wilson's realism as compared with Gainsborough's. While Gainsborough never merged a subject in some classic conception, or imported into it the ideas or fancies derived from classic sources, whereby Sir Joshua Reynolds often enhanced his effects, he often painted the draperies with no more regard for their actual resemblance than a Greek sculptor would have had, in his purely ideal and typical creations, for the garb of particular individuals. A coat was, no doubt, a coat, and a dress a dress, but its representation in a Gainsborough portrait would not always have led to the identification of either garment by the owner thereof.

Wilson, however, seems to have allowed himself but



'Niobe' (pp. 201-2).



Limitations in Portraiture

little freedom in this way; and the fact is significant. Wilson's art, as a whole, challenges comparison with Gainsborough's very largely by its realism: he is altogether a very much more objective painter than his younger rival, and though in a general sense his genius must be understood by reference to his own subjective personality, still, it must be borne in mind that his place in Art—considering him as a landscape-painter—will always have to be estimated by the degree in which he advanced the art nearer to actual nature. *Realism*

In his other portraits Wilson was never himself—not even in that in which he represented himself. His work in this kind, taken as a whole, is quite unworthy of him. It might be called good painting, but certainly nothing better. In outward delineation, that is to say, it is for the most part good; but it falls very far short both of that inner ethical or psychological significance which attached to form and colour in the Old Masters generally—and in Wilson himself in landscape-painting—and of that outward, formal, and pictorial beauty, consisting simply in form and colour only, which the modern impressionist exemplifies. Wilson, in a word, showed no grasp of his art as a portrait-painter, either in its symbolical and significant, or its purely executive aspect. His portraits are not

Richard Wilson, R.A.

creations, embodying perception of character or suggestions of beauty which, even while they are true to mere material appearances, transcend their limits and fuse them all in an ideal harmony. Nor are they, on the other hand, pictures fulfilling their purpose in being merely pleasing to the actual eyesight. The drawing is often exquisite, and the colour is always good, but the canvases generally convey a sharp, hard and mapped-out impression, and want the ease and swiftness, the broad effect and unfinish, and—more important than all—the peculiar sense of mystery, which are the marks of a masterpiece. A picture in which this inferiority is specially apparent is the portrait-group of the two young princes, the Prince of Wales (afterwards George III.) and the Duke of York, with their tutor, Dr. Ayscough, to be seen in the National Portrait Gallery. Judged by the standards set by the Old Masters generally, this is a work in which Wilson, as a portrait-painter, is seen in his strictest limits. If the peculiar excellence looked for be that naturally suggested by the fact that Reynolds and Gainsborough were Wilson's chief contemporaries, it must be admitted at once that in this typical instance it is very far to seek. If such a standard of beauty involve a further reference to the style drawn and developed by the Reynolds-Gainsborough tradition in

'Prentice Period

the first place from Van Dyck, then Wilson's deficiency becomes plainer than ever.

It is an irrepressible feeling arising from such a picture that the painter is no fit company for the great Flemish Master in that happy destiny which Gainsborough dreamed of as the last reward of a portraitist. There is nothing exactly *The Last Reward* heavenly in any of Wilson's portraits; they have mostly force and truth in them, but no beauty. They have all Wilson's realism, but none of his higher qualities. They recall all the conventionalism with which he composed landscapes, but suggest none of that spirit by which he interpreted scenery and gave to its representation his wondrous poetic unity as well as painter-like harmony. Wilson, in short, as a portrait-painter, even at the age of nearly forty, was an undeveloped artist; his long practice of portraiture was a mere preliminary drudgery in the executive part of painting; the representative part was supplied only by his landscapes.

We are not enabled to watch Wilson's development from this 'prentice period to his full maturity. There is no work remaining to us that would seem to herald his great landscape period. Quite suddenly we see him in Italy a master of his art, as though he had never attempted that art before. Yet to say, as indeed is

Richard Wilson, R.A.

said all too commonly, that he had not in fact attempted it before, is clearly not the truth. It is neither true that Wilson had never painted landscape before he went to Italy nor that he devoted himself to that art exclusively after his return thence. But I shall have more to say of this later. Meanwhile we must follow him to "fresh woods and pastures new."

CHAPTER V.

ITALY.

Italian influence—Friends and advisers—Independence—Pre-Italian period—"Well done, water!"—Niagara—Zuccarelli—Journey to Rome—Vernet and Mengs—Diploma portrait—The Eternal City—Naturalized in antiquity—Objection to "Niobe"—"Mæcenæ's Villa"—Impressive treatment—Inimitable in architecture—The learning of his art—The Campagna—Solemn interest.

ITALY, great in herself, has, like ancient Rome, been even greater in her influence upon other countries. Like ancient Rome, too, she has been greatest in influence when her own glory was least. Her Art, the greatest of her glories, had been long in decadence before it began most powerfully to affect the Art of the Northern nations. In the eighteenth century there was not a painter in Italy who could be compared for a moment with the men of the mediæval and Renaissance periods. Even in the seventeenth century, the impetus given to painting by the large, animating ideals of the three preceding centuries had been only faintly felt, and from

*Italian
Influence*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

the time of Raphael onwards, Italian Art as a whole had been slowly declining. In place of creative genius, it gave evidence more and more of a mere sense of display, of technicality and of mannerism. Peculiarity, indeed, was what passed for power; and what Carlyle described as the "Correggiosity of Correggio"—that lovely mannerism which defies other description—had at the hands of Correggio's artistic descendants some not very artistic developments. Ingenious oddity denoted individuality, and originality was so entirely wanting that the painters had perforce to derive even their peculiarities from the style of earlier masters. Thus Tiepolo, who was about contemporary in Italy with Wilson in England, merely mannerized Veronese. He was one, in fact, of a school of "mannerists," actually so called.

Yet Italy had still the power to inspire. To Italian scenery during this time of the decadence of Italian painting was due the greatest advance in the art, first of France and then of England. The Frenchmen Claude and Poussin imported into their landscapes from the country surrounding Rome—notwithstanding their "idealism"—some real feeling for Nature; and Richard Wilson coming after them and developing freely and gracefully, in accordance only with what he saw for himself in the same romantic district, their

William Locke of Norbury

artistic tradition and that of Rosa, acquired that style and power which entitle him to rank as the father of landscape in England.

When Wilson went to Italy he was in his thirty-sixth year. In this decision to abandon temporarily his practice in portrait-painting, which, as we have already seen, must have been fairly remunerative, he was perhaps following the advice of others in addition to his own inclinations. He seems to have had at the time a number of friends and patrons, and this was one of the happy incidents—too rare, alas, in his unhappy career—in which he did not find it necessary to run counter to them. Chief amongst them, either before or shortly after his arrival in Italy, was William Locke of Norbury—a virtuoso claiming relationship with Locke the philosopher. This man had both wealth and taste, and in the use he made of them he was a good type of his time. His house at Norbury was a palace of Art, and one of its most frequent visitors was Fanny Burney. Wilson painted his portrait, and in the opinion of Locke's son, who, in addition to Norbury Park, inherited all the paternal taste for painting, the picture must be considered creditable to Wilson's talents. It was painted in Venice, and according to Britton in his *Fine Arts of the English School*, the interviews thereby

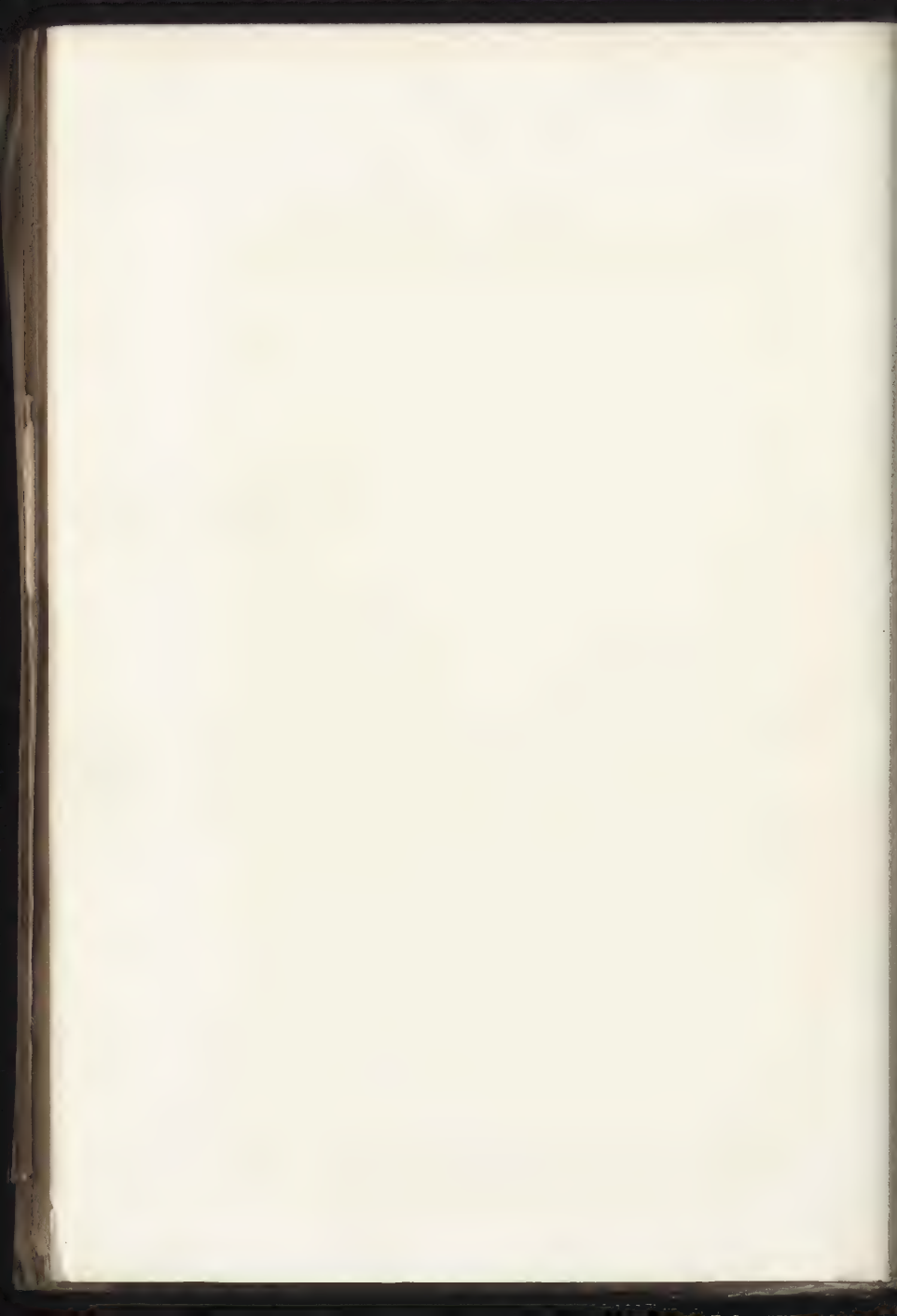
*Friends
and
Advisers*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

occasioned between sitter and artist laid the foundation of a friendship which was afterwards highly advantageous from the point of view of the artist. Britton had the authority of the younger Locke himself for the statement as to the merits of the portrait of the elder Locke, and should therefore have been in a position to know exactly the history of the relationship between the artist and his subject. The friendship may therefore have originated in the way Britton describes; but it would seem from another authority that it may possibly have begun in London before Wilson left, and that, indeed, the artist's journey to Italy—which had long been in project—was undertaken on Locke's approval. Thomas Hastings, an assiduous student of Wilson, states in a brief account of the artist which he published in a volume of etchings he had made from the Ford collection of Wilson's works, that Locke and not Zuccarelli should have been given the credit for advising Wilson to abandon portraiture. Hastings cited as his authority "a gentleman of the highest respectability," whom he only designates as Mr. R——s. There can be no doubt, however, that the person thereby intended is Samuel Rogers, the banker, author of the well-known poem *Italy*, an art connoisseur whose house in St. James's Park, London, in the early nineteenth century was a resort of all the talents and a



"River Scene with Ruins."



Visit to Italy

centre, therefore, of the best talk on topics, personal or otherwise, connected with artists. Hastings states that Rogers told him a circumstantial story, and says Locke perceived that Wilson's essential qualities could only be brought to maturity on classic soil. Locke might have perceived this, of course, in Italy quite as well as in London; but the reference herein implied to Wilson's classic propensities in landscape-painting suggests an acquaintance with the artist and his ideas of landscape extending farther back than the date of the portrait—1749—at which, according to Britton, the friendship began. In 1749-50 Wilson could only just have arrived in Italy, and the probability, therefore, is that Locke knew his work—supposing he really gave the advice he is said to have given—before sitting to him for his portrait in Venice.

But whether it was on Locke's initiative that Wilson went to Italy, or whether it was Locke or Zuccarelli, or both, who advised him to devote himself to landscape, matters very little. Wilson *Independence* would in any case have made the journey, and though he no doubt had the concurrence of friends in his proposal to abandon portraiture, his resolution on this as on most other occasions would have held good without it. Nothing, in fact, in all his career shows better than this visit to Italy his independence and self-

Richard Wilson, R.A.

confidence—unless it be perhaps an incident towards the end of the visit. Wilson, who was in Rome at the time, was commissioned by the Duke of Bridgewater to paint a landscape illustrating the story of Niobe. The Duke, taking dislike to the figures as Wilson painted them, employed an Italian artist named Platina da Constanza to alter these to his Grace's requirements, whereat Wilson became highly incensed. He immediately set to work on another picture of the same dimensions on the same subject, and bringing it with him to England, showed it, together with "Celadon and Amelia," at the first Royal Academy Exhibition, which was held in 1760. Wilson's unbending nature, of which this is but one of many instances, no doubt cost him the loss, later in his life, of a good deal more patronage; and it may be supposed therefore that if the latter part of his visit to Italy was marked by disagreement with an influential personage, its beginning denoted an attitude which was no less resolute. The visit was undoubtedly premeditated for the purpose of perfecting powers which Wilson knew he possessed in landscape-painting.

If disproof were wanted, other than inherent improbability, of the notion that Wilson was, up to this period, unaware of his powers in this kind of painting, it could not be said to be wholly wanting. Only one

Early Work in Landscape

picture by him, other than his portraits, can indeed be mentioned with certainty as having been done already; but from the fact that this is a view of Dover it seems highly improbable that it was the only thing of the kind attempted by him during the dozen years or more that

*Pre-
Italian
Period*

he had been in practice in London since completing his apprenticeship in the obscure Covent Garden studio. Why a scene indeed so far away from his usual haunts as Dover for an only attempt at landscape? It might, of course, be supposed that the work was thrown off quite casually while Wilson—swallow-like—was waiting on the sea-coast for a favourable time for departure. That, however, seems hardly probable when it is borne in mind that a print was engraved from the picture by J. S. Miller. It would hardly have received that attention surely had it been the work of an unpractised hand in landscape-painting. The picture has, unfortunately, long since perished, so that no idea can be given of its qualities. It is noticeable, however, in this connection that, although Wilson rarely essayed marine pieces pure and simple, yet when he did so his seas were most vivaciously suggested, his success being most apparent in effects of storm and tumult.

Waters, however, of whatever description always had their attraction for him. He delighted alike in seas,

Richard Wilson, R.A.

lakes, and rivers, and in rushing torrents. "Well done, water, by G——!" he was once heard by Reynolds to exclaim suddenly at Terni, after standing "Well done, Water!" silently some moments lost in admiration of the well-known fall there; and again in the President's presence he once waxed eloquent over the fine view of the Thames from the terrace at Richmond. The story is told, too, that while Stothard was a student at the Royal Academy he one day requested Wilson—who was then librarian to that institution in its old Somerset House quarters—to suggest to him something to copy. Wilson happened to be standing looking out of a window commanding a view of the river, and he replied by drawing the young man's attention to the scene there, remarking that he could not well have anything better to copy than that.

Better than any anecdotes, however, relating to this feeling for water, is the fine painting of Niagara which Wilson did from a drawing. Here he seems to have caught the spirit of the scene by the imagination, the quick sympathy of genius, as indeed he caught the spirit of all other scenes which he transferred to his canvas. Wilson's sympathy with Nature generally should, in fact, be enough to preclude the idea that he was not a born painter of her.

Sojourn in Italy

Although only one landscape can be stated with certainty to have been painted by him before going to Italy, it is in the highest degree improbable that he had not up to that time painted more than that one.

Wilson stayed in Italy six years, passing the happiest period of his life there. Not only did the country delight him, but the face of Nature must have seemed the sweeter for once for the few but fit companions whom he gathered around him. Until the unfortunate incident with the Duke of Bridgewater, rank, fashion, and genius seemed to conspire to please and even to flatter him. Besides the friendship of Locke, he enjoyed acquaintance with the artists Zuccarelli, Mengs, and Vernet, and had as patrons at different times and places not only his Grace of Bridgewater, but the Earls of Pembroke, Thanet, and Essex, Viscount Bolingbroke, and Lord Dartmouth. It was in the actual company, indeed, of the three Earls and the Viscount that he made sketches for one of the best known and most characteristic of his Italian landscapes—"Mæcnas' Villa." Their lordships dined and spent the day together on the spot on which Wilson worked.

That, however, was in 1754, when Wilson had settled in Rome, and had been four years in Italy. He went

Richard Wilson, R.A.

first to Venice, where Zuccarelli, then at the height of his fame as a painter of light and graceful landscape, soon honoured him with his recognition. *Zuccarelli* The acquaintance which followed did the Italian the very greatest credit. It spoke well, not for his courtesy only, but for his art as well. Inferior though he undoubtedly was, Zuccarelli was at least quick to perceive that the English visitor had genius, and he took such steps as he could both to assist Wilson in his studies and to make his work known to purchasers. Nor was the fashionable Italian's style without its effect on the Englishman's. There are some of Wilson's landscapes which, while they are never insipid as Zuccarelli's always are, suggest not a little of that artist's lightness. Wilson, it must be borne in mind, had the most exquisite delicacy as well as power and dignity in his style of painting, and it is in this gentler quality that, like other artists before and after him, he may possibly owe a little to a painter vastly inferior to him.

Zuccarelli, like Wilson, had not become a landscape-painter all at once. He had started with historical pieces; and his love of figure, which he never wholly lost, and which was indeed the source of much of the charm of his pictures, no doubt appealed to Wilson, who was always deeply enamoured of this adjunct to

Figure in Landscape

landscape. Such a point of resemblance would account perhaps for the mutual attractiveness of the two men. It has been even asserted by some that Wilson's original purpose in going to Italy was to pursue his studies in figure-drawing; but though I think the assertion is quite mistaken—as I also think is any other statement seeming to deprive the artist of his own consciousness of supremacy as, first and foremost, a painter of landscape—still, an inherent aptitude for figure played an important part in Wilson's development, and here it is quite conceivable that Zuccarelli might have been of some use to him. Directly, Wilson had nothing to learn, indeed, from a master of merely decorative landscape save possibly the accessories; but, indirectly and imperceptibly, I fancy that the study of the accessories may have re-acted somewhat on his main notions of landscape. At all events, Wilson was capable of a much lighter manner than that commonly assumed to be characteristic of him. Characteristic it assuredly is, but, as the more impressive quality, his heroic grandeur should not be allowed to detract from his more modest merits. One might instance some of his pencil drawings, some of his scenes in England, and even in Italy—notably, I think, the views of his well-loved Nemi—as samples of a delicate skilfulness that one scarcely associates with such efforts as the "Niobe." Wilson

Richard Wilson, R.A.

was perhaps an actual pupil of Zuccarelli, and it was possibly under the influence of that artist's elegant though insipid manner that he was enabled afterwards to give grace to his pencil and to spread over his landscapes their poetic charm.

Zuccarelli, it is pleasant to remember, was, like Wilson, a foundation member of the Royal Academy. It was a fair reward for the liberality which he showed to the Englishman in Italy that, on setting up in London, he acquired no less celebrity than he had earned in Venice. With all his kindness, however, one must still lament the injustice which, on their strictly artistic merits, gave his productions the preference over those of the "native-born" artist.

Quitting Venice, Wilson journeyed to Rome and spent there the greater part of his remaining years in Italy. He set out in company with *Journey to Rome* his friend William Locke and travelled by slow stages, making many studies and sketches by the way.

In Rome, as in Venice, Wilson had not long to wait before his work was noticed. Horace Vernet and *Vernet and Mengs* Raphael Mengs, who were at that time in the city and in high repute there, but who were respectively of French and German origin, both showed their sense of the Welshman's



"Solitude" (p. 192).



Mengs's Portrait

genius, and surpassed even the Italian Zuccarelli in the treatment they forthwith accorded him. It is to Mengs's friendship for Wilson that we are indebted for the most familiar portrait of him. This was painted in exchange for one of Wilson's landscapes at the request of Mengs, and is not only interesting on this account, and as a portrait of Wilson merely, but as one of the best of all Mengs's pictures. It is a spirited likeness, and as a whole is happily conceived and finely executed. It shows Wilson, palette and brush in hand, seated in front of his easel, his face turned to the spectator. He sits erect in an easy posture, and seems to have turned but momentarily away from his canvas. On this a landscape is just outlined, a single tall tree—of the form so familiar to the student of Wilson—seeming to enclose and round off the whole by its outspreading branches from the right of the foreground; while another characteristic of Wilson's landscapes, the waving line of mountains in the distance, is just hinted at. Wilson wears a costume which seems to have been usual with him when at work in his studio. It resembles that of Hogarth in the well-known portrait which that artist painted of himself and "Trump," his favourite pug-dog; but, unlike the satirist's, it is worked all over with a flowered device. The loose, turban-like headdress which Wilson seems to have

Richard Wilson, R.A.

worn on almost all occasions instead of a wig is not unbecoming, and his whole appearance—the habit suiting well his somewhat corpulent figure—suggests the easiest and most indolent temperament, though in the broad smiling countenance there is just a suggestion of fitfulness, as though lurking anger might at any moment break forth and cloud it. The picture was bought from Wilson by Sir Watkin Williams Wynn; and is now, together with a number of Wilson's own works, at Wynnstay. A copy of it was made by Taylor under Wilson's inspection.

Wilson's portrait of himself which hangs in the Diploma Gallery of the Royal Academy in London, and which is reproduced as the frontispiece to this volume, by permission of that body, *Diploma Portrait* is not, I think, so happy an effort as the work of Mengs, but inasmuch as it is his diploma picture, it is unique in interest. It is the best of all the portraits, three in number, which Wilson painted of himself, and is, after the Mortimer picture, the best example of Wilson's portrait-work. It belongs to a later period of his life than Mengs's picture, but making allowance for that, it seems to have been as good a likeness, and if only for its colouring, which is characteristic of Wilson, being rich, quiet, and harmonious, is well worthy the reward which the artist received

Lord Dartmouth's Patronage

in having it placed in the Diploma Gallery. One can hardly refrain, however, from regarding the recognition which it thus secured to Wilson's merits as a left-handed compliment. The father of English landscape, "second to none," in the words of Opie, in the heroic order of landscape, was accorded this highest honour for his portrait-painting!

Vernet's sympathy with Wilson was of the most practical kind. He exhibited a landscape by him and frankly praised his works to patrons, even above his own. "Don't talk of my landscapes only," he is said to have exclaimed to English visitors to his studio, "when your own countryman, Wilson, paints so beautifully!" That, surely, was handsome of the Frenchman!

Wilson's most notable English patrons in Rome have been already mentioned. Chief amongst them as regards the extent of his patronage seems to have been Lord Dartmouth. This nobleman invited Wilson to join him on a tour to Naples, and the proposal proving acceptable, many drawings and sketches resulted from it. These were done on the journey, and in addition to them there were mentioned by Britton in the *Fine Arts of the English School* as having been in Lord Dartmouth's possession two of Wilson's landscapes, one being the "Distant View of Rome," which was engraved by Middiman.

Richard Wilson, R.A.

Naples, as well as Rome, therefore afforded Wilson not a little of his inspiration, but its enchantment was not equal to the spell of Rome. To the years he spent in the Eternal City studying works of Old Masters and making comparisons between them and his own observations in the surrounding country, Wilson owed, indeed, if not the last, certainly the most lasting of all influences over his painting. Rome had, I should say, been his objective from the first. There the works of the masters existed in greater variety and were more accessible to students than in any other city; and it was more as a student of painting than as a consummate artist that Wilson had come to Italy. It was with no vague purpose that he had undertaken the journey. He could have been under no misapprehension as to the advantage he expected to derive abroad, nor could he have been ignorant, either, what were the particular places and pictures which were most worth his studying. He had been largely preoccupied with the painting of the Poussins, and just as Turner after him might be said to have caught the colours of the Campagna before seeing Italy, Wilson had felt its attraction by anticipation, and had felt it in a way which only an artist having a mind thrown back two thousand years—as

“Niobe”

Sir Joshua Reynolds said of Poussin—could possibly feel it.

Sir Joshua, in saying this of the Frenchman, spoke to his own countryman's detriment. He was, however, unjust to Wilson. If acclimatization to a classic atmosphere is, as his words imply, *Naturalized in Antiquity* to be taken as a standard of comparison, the British Master is inferior to no one.

Wilson was “naturalized in antiquity” by almost every influence that could throw his mind back thither. He was of pure Celtic origin, sprung of the stock of ancient royalty, born and bred amid scenery recalling historic happenings, and trained to look on the past, through the classical literature, with some of the thoughts of the classical people themselves. I am not concerned, indeed, to assert that Wilson has, in the particular picture of which Reynolds was speaking when he passed his criticism, attained the height of his power in classical landscape. On the contrary, it must be very generally admitted that Wilson failed in his “Niobe.” Yet if stricture is to be passed on him, it must be for another reason than that assigned by Sir Joshua. I conceive that even in his failure Wilson was a greater artist than the President was—for once—a critic. Reynolds complains that Wilson has represented the landscape “too near common nature!”

Richard Wilson, R.A.

As though common nature, forsooth, was not common to antiquity; as though it was something different from common nature nowadays; and as though a modern but mythological landscape must be any less a landscape or any less modern because mythological! There can be no fault, surely, in Wilson's selection and arrangement of objects in "Niobe"; and as for the objects themselves, they were the same a couple of thousand years ago as they are to-day. Cloud, rock, or river would have been to an observer in antiquity only what each is to an observer nowadays—cloud, rock, or river; but where the difference does arise, of course, is in the interpretation given to nature and not in its actual appearances. Here, however, is Wilson's very excellence. It is just in his manner of realizing the interpretation given in antiquity that he is most admirable in classical landscape.

The true objection to "Niobe" is not, as Reynolds supposed, on the side of imaginative insight, but arises rather from technical executive defect. *Objection to "Niobe"* How completely "naturalized" by imagination Wilson was in antiquity is plain enough in this as in all his other mythological or allusive landscapes. A typically fine achievement as showing his love of classicism, is his well-known "Apollo and the Seasons"; but perhaps on the whole Wilson

“Mæcenas’ Villa”

is better represented, in the ambitious line of his work, by topographical or semi-historical, than by strictly mythological, subjects. These, indeed, explain why it was that he had made Rome his objective.

In its own kind, “Mæcenas’ Villa,” of which there are several pictures besides the one already referred to, must be allowed considerable pre-eminence. “Mæcenas’
Amidst such memorials of a still decaying, Villa”
still enduring antiquity, Wilson finds the
theme best fitted to his powers; and “Mæcenas’
Villa” was a theme eminently fitted to them. The scene appealed to him intimately without overwhelming his power of treating it artistically—as, unfortunately, the “Niobe” did overwhelm it,—and the result has been that, notwithstanding the impressive solemnity of the picture, Wilson has shown here all that “manly way” and that “freshness of feeling” which even Ruskin, who considers him to have been overpowered by the Poussins, gives him occasional credit for. The Villa, which is the central subject of the representation, stands on the Anio, a tributary of the Tiber. To the right, among cypress trees, is a Jesuit monastery, and below that, on the rising slope, a temple of Tussis. Beneath the Villa itself is seen issuing from the rock a stream, the “fons Bandusiae” of Horace, whose own villa stood on the opposite bank. It is noticeable, as

Richard Wilson, R.A.

bearing on Wilson's realism, that the costumes worn by the women who are seen dipping for water is not imaginary, but is the actual dress of the peasant women of Italy during the eighteenth century. This is another instance of Wilson's treatment of costume on which I have broadly commented in dealing with his very pleasing "Mortimer" picture.

The ruins of villas, temples, tombs, and aqueducts are always most impressively treated by Wilson, but it is noticeable that he himself seemed to have possessed a predilection for temples, and to have taken special pride in his power of rendering them. This is well shown by an anecdote relating to his later life in London, when the slights of fortune were the more keenly felt by him because of his own consciousness of merit, and when therefore he was disposed to be easily offended. He was inspecting a picture painted by one of his pupils, Jones by name, when he exclaimed suddenly—

"How now, Mr. Jones, you have stolen my temple!"

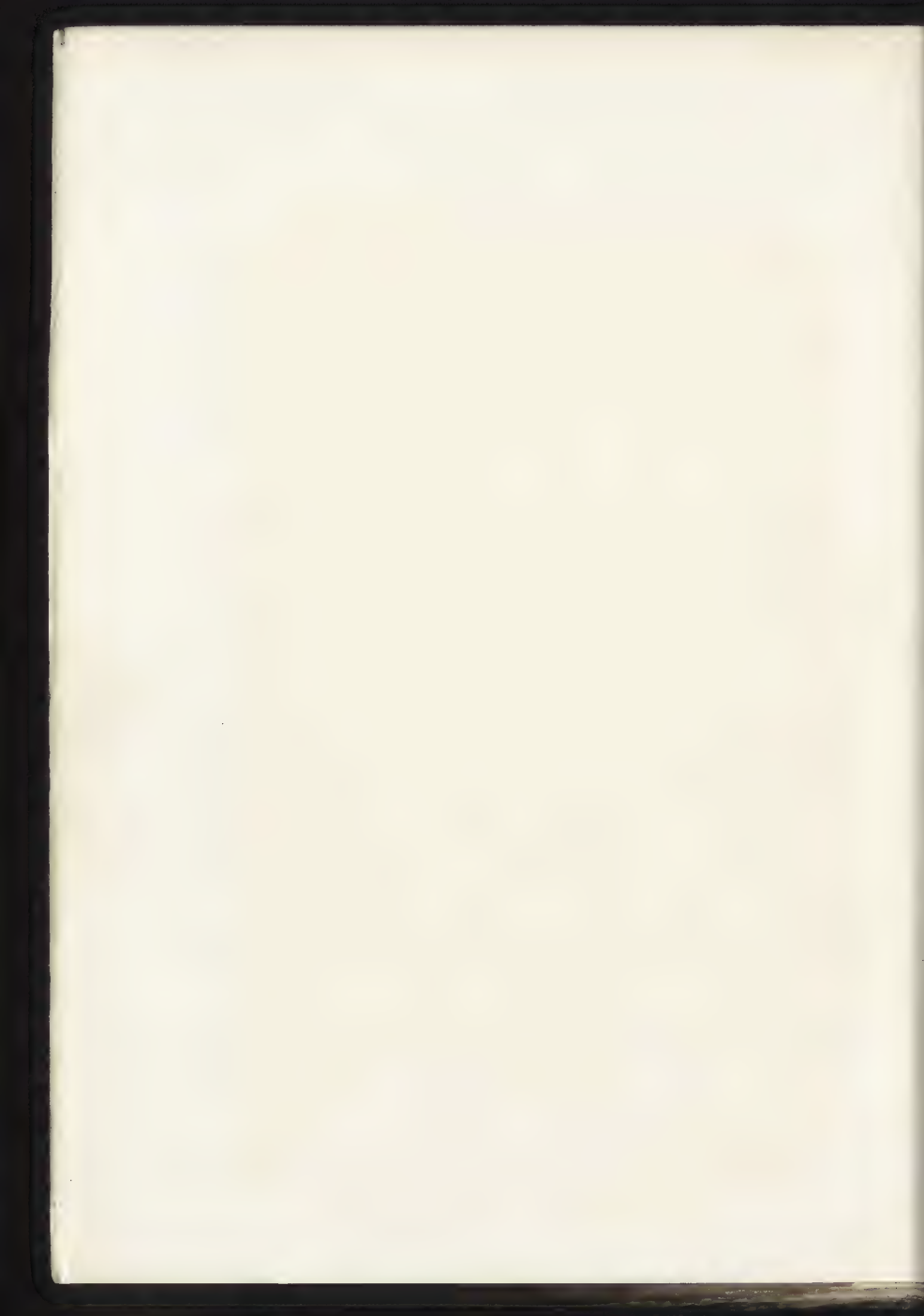
"Why, sir, is it too dark?" inquired the pupil.

"Black enough, of all conscience, sir!" retorted Wilson.

Notwithstanding its blackness, however, there is something comic in Mr. Jones's plagiarism. Had he transcribed a picture instead of one particular object he would have done as much injury to Wilson as has been



"A Ruin in Italy,"



Architectural Accessories

done to Titian by a painter of the name of Jervas, who, after copying one of the great Italian's masterpieces, thought he had not only improved upon him but out-distanced him for ever. "What would 'little Tit' say to this?" he exclaimed exultingly; and it is perhaps safe to answer nowadays, as undoubtedly Jervas himself would have answered—though not exactly in the same sense,—that "little Tit" would certainly not have known himself.

That Wilson knew himself in Mr. Jones's performance is, of course, so far creditable to Mr. Jones's talent; but one is inclined to doubt on reflection if Wilson was giving expression to a sense of pique, and not of humour, in upbraiding the plagiarist. Architectural objects, as painted by Wilson, defy real imitation, and had Mr. Jones's conduct been as dark as his temple—had he copied Wilson as stealthily as he no doubt did openly—he would thereby have overshadowed him to about the same extent as Jervas overshadowed Titian.

But curiously enough, although Wilson is so inimitable in his architectural accessories, he has been adversely criticized for them. In a publication of 1824, entitled *Some Account of the Life of Richard Wilson, R.A.*, by T. Wright, of Norwood, which has so far held the field as the one and only volume dealing

*Inimitable
in
Architecture*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

wholly, or even mainly, with Wilson, one of the ablest passages is in reference to this criticism. Wright was himself the possessor of a number of Wilson's pictures, and appears to have been an admiring but discriminating student of the artist's work as a whole. As such he seems to have been fully aware of the importance of architecture to the grand kind of landscape, and he sufficiently indicates his sense of Wilson's particular excellence in the use of this accessory in some of his paintings by simply instancing the adverse remarks of an earlier writer, and taking occasion to mark his dissent from them. The earlier writer in question was the author of a little-known work called *Carey's Thoughts*, published in Manchester in 1808, which, were it not for the paucity of writings relative to Wilson, would well deserve the obscurity into which it has long since fallen. Such, however, has been the persistent neglect of the grandest of early British landscapists, that some gratitude is owing to whatever attempts may have been made in the past to do him justice, and in *Carey's Thoughts* the passages referring to Wilson are, except for their inconceivably erratic remarks in respect of his architecture, very highly appreciative.

The author asserts that "in what may be called the learning of his art, architectural introductions, ancient

Classical Landscape

ruins, and classic embellishments, he is surpassed by Gaspar and Nicolo Poussin, by Grimaldi, Dolonesi, the Caracci, Domenichino, and by Claude," and he goes on to say that "if, in the celebrated passage from Shakespeare, we take away

*The
Learning
of his Art*

'The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples,'

by so doing we strip

'the great globe itself

of its grandeur, and the description loses its elevation. In the higher class of landscape, the effect of architectural pomp is precisely the same. Remove the ruined temples, palaces, and columns, and you strip the scene of its most solemn and imposing features. You exhibit a naked nature which, however wild or grand, will have lost its chief power over the heart. Let a person of taste examine the grandest landscapes of Nicolo Poussin or any of the Masters already mentioned, and he will find that, like Shakespeare's 'great globe,' they owe a main portion of their imposing loftiness to the buildings with which they are decorated."

Wright is content to refute all this, in so far as it reflects on Wilson, by merely instancing such pictures as "Phaeton," "Apollo and the Seasons," "A View of

Richard Wilson, R.A.

Rome," "Niobe," "A View in Italy," "The Tomb of the Horatii and Curiatii," and "The Broken Bridge of Narni." These, he rightly observes, contain the very finest "architectural introductions," such as the Coliseum, the Temple of the Sybil, the bridges and magnificent remains of aqueducts about Rome, "no less than the greatest abundance and variety of tasteful and classic embellishments such as urns, tombs, ruined columns, friezes, statues, bas-reliefs, the latter of which especially are continually introduced by Wilson with singular judgment and felicity into his foregrounds."

The matter ought, however, in justice to Wilson's essential genius, to be carried farther than this. Carey's quotation from Shakespeare is not in itself inept, but it is quite wrongly applied. So far from stripping the world of grandeur, Wilson clothes it with those very forms which, in the poet's conception, appear the loftiest. In his temples especially he is always "solemn." But at the same time no one has ever revealed amidst the most imposing of all edifices and memorials—those associated with antiquity—a greater truth of feeling. Wilson, notwithstanding his solemnity, never allows himself to be overborne or oppressed even by the solemnly moving spectacle of the ancient Roman architecture. It is quite true that Wilson's greatest efforts have, as Ruskin says of some

Wild and Wasted Plain

of Titian's, "as much of human emotion as of imitative truth" in them; and they are therefore liable, perhaps, as Ruskin adds, "to some appearance of failure when compared with a less pathetic statement of fact." But, failures as they may be, their statement of fact is not more pathetic than the facts themselves would seem to warrant. How pathetic a statement the facts at Rome do warrant is sufficiently shown by the author of *Modern Painters* himself in his description of the Campagna.

"Let the reader," he writes, "imagine himself for a moment withdrawn from the sounds and motion of the living world and sent forth alone into this wild and wasted plain. The earth yields and crumbles beneath his feet, tread he *The Campagna* never so lightly; for its substance is white, hollow and carious, like the dusty wreck of the bones of men. The long, knotted grass waves and tosses feebly in the evening wind, and the shadows of its motion shake feverishly along the banks of ruin that lift themselves to the sunlight. Hillocks of mouldering earth heave around him as if the dead beneath were struggling in their sleep; scattered blocks of black stone, four square, remnants of mighty edifices, not one left upon another, lie upon them to keep them down. A dull purple, poisonous haze stretches level along the desert, veiling

Richard Wilson, R.A.

its spectral wrecks of massy ruins on whose rents the red light rests, like dying fire on defiled altars. The blue ridge of the Alban Mount lifts itself against a space of green, clear, quiet sky. Watch-towers of dark clouds stand steadfastly along the promontories of the Apennines. From the plain to the mountains the shattered aqueducts, pier beyond pier, melt into the darkness, like shadowy and countless troops of funeral mourners passing from a nation's grave."

There is human emotion enough in that, surely; but while no statement of the facts could be more "pathetic," none certainly could be any truer. Similarly, there is nothing in Wilson's Roman landscapes or their solemn memorials but what the actual scenery itself warrants. It may be conjectured that he must often have been disposed to see in the ruined objects he painted some emblem of his life. Yet he never obtrudes himself into the picture. If he paints his shadow, it is because his shadow properly falls there. He never attitudinized so as to make it fall there. Wilson is, indeed, far more properly to be considered an objective than a subjective artist. Whatever of his own emotion there may be in his landscapes, they are always actual landscapes, and are never merely pretexts for subjective expression. While there is undoubtedly "human emotion" in them, there is never

Emblematic of his Life

more than, even if there is sometimes as much as, there is of "imitative truth." The emotion is, in fact, there for no other reason than that the truth requires it to be there. The scenes themselves suggest it. This, indeed, is the real explanation of the comparative limitation of Wilson's range of subject in his better-known paintings; he selects only scenes in which the response of Nature is most plainly given, and these are not of the kind most commonly met with. His sympathy is at its deepest in those scenes in which, as Fuseli observed, his spirit seems allied to bustle, terror, and convulsion—a notable example is his "Meleager"—but it also displays itself in some few scenes no less beautiful, though less wild and less romantic.

But whatever he paints, Wilson is never without a certain solemn interest. Such is the interest, indeed, of Rome and of Italy; and such it was that led Wilson to study there. Much has been made of the comparison between him and Rosa, Claude, and the Poussins. It is, however, a comparison which is truly odious. It has no other basis, indeed, than that Wilson certainly studied them and sought similar sources for his inspiration. His style is, however, utterly different. He may even have borrowed from them, as he also borrowed from some of the Dutch and Flemish Masters; but whatever he

*Solemn
Interest*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

borrowed he transformed to something that was quite individual, and which he made wholly his own. Whatever he saw with the eyes of others, he saw also with his own eyes—and felt with his own heart ! He came to study at Rome not because the Campagna had inspired any one before him, but because he felt instinctively that it could inspire him.



"Apollo and the Seasons" (p. 102).



CHAPTER VI.

THE MIDDLE PERIOD.

Back in London—His real Métier—The Gipsies—Nemi and the Arno—Other Italian views—Best in composition—British Artists' Exhibition—Dire straits—Prices paid—Few commissions—Lodging to lodging—The pot of porter.

WILSON was back in London in 1756. During his stay abroad of six years or more, he had profited to an extent which probably only he himself had anticipated. Friends like William Locke *Back in London* of Norbury and Zuccarelli gave him only superfluous counsel when they urged him, as is commonly stated, to turn his attention to Italy and to landscape; this was, in fact, what he had all along been doing. The view of Dover, done before he left England, is, as already shown, not likely to have been a mere occasional essay. If, however, further proof were required as to Wilson's consciousness of his genius, and of the most suitable scenery in which to bring it to

Richard Wilson, R.A.

maturity, it could be supplied overwhelmingly from the simple record of his journey and its immediate outcome. Amongst all his works that can be definitely assigned to the years he passed in Italy, there is none that bears any evidence of a power as yet unformed or style unfinished.

Amongst them may be mentioned the original copy of the "Niobe," painted for the Duke of Bridgewater, which, whatever the justice of his Grace's displeasure with it, could hardly be deemed the work of a man who had been but a few years studying landscape. Moreover, there is not wanting evidence of the absorbing power of landscape over Wilson's mind the moment he set foot in Italy. Apart altogether from the fact that he is not known to have painted, during his Italian period, more than a single portrait—that of Locke—if even that, there are the large number of sketches done between Venice and Rome, and then again between Rome and Naples, to show his tireless interest in the scenes he encountered; while from a collection of thirty-six drawings done at Rome itself, a copy of which may be seen in the British Museum, it is clear that within a very short time of his arrival in Italy his pencil had been employed on landscape subjects to the highest degree of perfection to which it was ever employed.

“Vale of Narni”

All this is hardly consistent with the theory of new-found powers called into play in Italy by the merest accident. Besides the originals of “Niobe” and “Mæcenæ’s Villa,” there belong to the Italian period a number of landscapes which show Wilson at his best alike in drawing, colouring, and composition. Of a great many of these, replicas were done by him many years after his return to London, or copies were made differing somewhat from the original and from one another; while of some nothing but the studies was done in Italy, the subjects being revived in England and then wrought from memory, by the help of the studies into the finished paintings. Many examples of this, Wilson’s not uncommon method of working, were in the famous Ford collection. Among the Italian landscapes there, were several the subjects of which had been frequently treated by him. Of these, the “Vale of Narni” was not painted till 1774—when Wilson had been back in England eighteen years. It is, however, one of the best of his smaller Italian pictures—it measures about two feet eighteen inches by one foot six inches—and is a truly delightful picture. The scene lay forty miles or so from Rome.

“The Gipsies,” again, is the subject of two pictures, one of which was not painted until 1771, the date of the

*His Real
Métier*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

other—the Ford example, differing somewhat in treatment—being undetermined. The scene represented in each is the same. It shows the opening of a fine avenue of trees, and to the right a distant expanse of country, gently undulating, intersected by a winding river and bounded by low hills dimly descried in waving outline. Near the entrance to the avenue, on the right, are two men sitting, while on the left are two gipsy women standing, wearing a costume like that made so familiar by Italian women in the streets of London nowadays. The whole is a wonderful study in line and light and shade. As such, perhaps, there is more art in it than nature, but as art it is beautiful. Lady Ford's copy was but little over a foot in length; and there was noticeable in the left-hand corner of it an inscription, clearly legible, on a convenient milestone, "XV. miles from Rome," which was intended, it is thought, as a memorandum by the artist. The scene lay near Albano.

But of all the views in Italy of this gentle description—views, it may be remarked, which in themselves show how false is the charge that Wilson was overpowered by the Campagna and the painting of Poussin—it seems that the Lake of Nemi and the River Arno had his tenderest feelings.

Arno Views

His pictures of both these subjects show him to be one of the sweetest, as his more ambitious essays show him to be one of the grandest, of the landscape-painters. Of the views on the Arno there were three in all, one of them being an "upright" picture, standing some five feet in height, painted on a panel over a drawing-room mantelpiece. Another was about eight feet in length and proportionately high. It has been made the subject of glowing praises by Thomas Hastings in his book of etchings already referred to. "It baffles," to continue the words of this zealous but judicious admirer of Wilson's paintings, "all adequate description." "To me," he adds, "it is quite affectingly fine. It is impossible for any one susceptible of any feeling for the delightful art of landscape-painting to behold it and not to be immediately sensible that some high merits are there shining before him. According to the scale of my humble ideas of art, I should think it difficult to conceive that landscape-painting could be carried to a higher degree of excellence, or that any similar work could breathe a more delicious sensibility."

Dates cannot be assigned for all three of these pictures of the River Arno, but the upright example which was done for the drawing-room mantelpiece was, according to the same authority, painted in 1760. It is worth recalling here that the famous Arno scene which

Richard Wilson, R.A.

belonged to Lord de Tabley was, at that nobleman's sale, disposed of for nearly £500. Among representations of the Lake of Nemi, that known as "Speculum Dianæ," showing the nymph Calisto exposed to Diana, must have been done in or before the year 1764, as that is the date of Wood's engraving of it. The year 1761 is probably as near a date as can be assigned to it.

In 1765 engravings were made by William Byrne of the "View of Rome from the Villa Madonna" and of a

*Other
Italian
Views*

"View of the Campagna." Probably, therefore, these two views must also be added to the list of Italian landscapes done after Wilson had returned to England. As a

matter of fact, there are comparatively few of the Italian "views" actually painted in Italy. Many even of the purely topographical pictures are too general to have been painted directly and immediately from nature. Wilson differs in this respect from both Gainsborough and Constable. Although he was the father of English landscape, it was reserved, not for him, but for his younger contemporary to adopt the *plein air* method and give it a vogue it had never enjoyed before; while it was left for the Dedham Valley artist assiduously to teach and preach the "face to face with nature" attitude. Wilson's genius sought its expression much

Mastery of Composition

more than did either Gainborough's or Constable's in "composition," and he was accordingly able to permit himself much greater latitude in his representations. His colours in particular are more general than theirs, though, as has been observed by Carey in the book of *Thoughts* before referred to, this "general" colouring often leaves on the eye the effect of detail. This impression is secured by the "shadowy verdure of his landscapes and the living glow in his skies." Carey adds, however, that "in subjects more purely local, with less grandeur his colouring has more sweetness, more attention to detail, more variety." But even here his colours are not local merely. Allan Cunningham's phrase that he never painted for a mere "district survey" applies to this as to his other qualities in landscape-painting. His broad style required him generally to dispense with details, and hence it was less incumbent upon him than on the other two masters of English landscape to paint closely from the original and in actual presence of it. Very few of his pictures seem to have been painted out-of-doors. He would garner his "harvest of a quiet eye" in the open, but his ingatherings did not stop there. His love of nature was wonderful, but of Art no less so; and the result was that with all his truth of effect and freshness of feeling it must be said of his landscapes that, as

Richard Wilson, R.A.

even Constable said once in another connection, "Well, after all, you know, there *is* such a thing as the Art."

It is because there is so emphatically "such a thing as the Art" in Wilson—notwithstanding his love of nature—that he is seen at his best in composition. He could be direct enough when he chose, but it was not his purpose to paint only nature like the young enthusiast to whom the remark of Constable about "the Art" was addressed as a remonstrance. Whatever the local truth of his scenes, they have what I might call an artistic truth also. This is the truth seen best in his subject pictures. In these his genius is of a universal order. It is the result, indeed, not only of his study of nature, but of "the Art" of the best landscape-painters who had gone before him.

Besides these views and sketches of Italy which were largely done in England, there belong to the period of ten years or so immediately following Wilson's return to London many of his very finest paintings. Between 1760 and 1768—the year of the founding of the Royal Academy—nearly three dozen pictures were exhibited by him at the Society of British Artists. Among them may be named the "Temple of Clitumnus," 1761;



"Landscape Composition."



Porter and Stilton

"The White Monk," 1762; "Phaeton," 1763; and a "Summer Storm" ("Celadon and Amelia"), 1765.

The "Ceyx and Alcyone" also belonged to this period, and marks its culmination, having been painted some time before the year 1769.

This is the picture which is generally said to have been painted by Wilson in return for a pot of porter and the remains of a Stilton. The alternative story, before alluded to, mentioned by Allan Cunningham, to the effect that the picture was done *from* a cheese and a pot of porter, and not *for* them, is in itself perfectly plausible. The decayed hues and broken form of the remains of a Stilton might certainly have suggested to Wilson ideas of rugged and romantic scenery even as bits of coal and odd fragments of glass, with a few other objects, often provided Gainsborough with an artificial study which he found extremely useful.

From the dire straits, however, in which Wilson found himself within a few years of his return from Italy, it seems that the usual form of the story must be accepted as equally credible.

*Dire
Straits*

He had come back to find that although he had increased his reputation among all those by whom landscape-painting was really appreciated, these patrons of the art were too few as yet, however distinguished their patronage, to make it as profitable a calling—

Richard Wilson, R.A.

except, indeed, from the point of view of those who followed it for merely decorative purposes—as either portraiture or historical painting. Wilson's earlier practice in portrait-painting had been determined, I think, up to the time of his leaving England, by the greater profit which he found to attach to it; but notwithstanding that the two portraits by him which are his best—namely, that of J. H. Mortimer and that of Wilson himself in the Diploma Gallery of the Royal Academy—were done after his return, it seems that owing to the reputation which had in the meantime been earned by rival portraitists, Wilson now found that, professionally, even this branch of his art was as unremunerative to him as formerly he had found the other branch. He was too good an artist and too honest a man not to recognize his inferiority, in the more popular art of portrait-painting, to Reynolds or Gainsborough; and though he doubtless painted portraits whenever he got the opportunity, commissions must have come his way but very seldom. The two notable pictures just referred to as the only certain examples of his post-Italian period in portrait-painting seem to have been done, indeed, for the simple love of painting, with perhaps an added hope of enhanced reputation, but certainly not with the prospect of any immediate return pecuniarily.

Scarcity of Buyers

It was the same with the great majority of his landscapes. He was seldom paid, it is true—when he was paid at all,—quite so low a price for these as would be represented by the pot of ale and Stilton story, nor had he to depend all along on the liberality of friends and fellow-artists like Paul Sandby, who is said to have paid him more for pictures than he knew they would fetch in the open market. Nor, again, had he at first to resort to humiliating devices such as appeals to pawnbrokers or the imposture of passing off pictures as by his own hand when perhaps they were only touched or finished off by him; but his landscapes, though they commanded very fair prices when they were sold at all, were in so little demand among connoisseurs that the total income which Wilson received from them was quite inadequate. It was his inability to dispose of his work which, more than anything else, kept him continually in poverty. Sir Augustus W. Callcott, writing to Sir Francis Chantrey, cites the authority of Farrington, one of Wilson's pupils, in support of this contention, and he adds—"In such pictures as those of his which Farrington had and Constable has he used to receive from ten to fifteen guineas, which, according to the value of money then, is quite equal to the price received by almost any of us now."

*Prices
Paid*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

As further evidence that it was not so much the price paid for commissions that Wilson had to complain of, as the paucity of them, the following note by Winstanley, an auctioneer of repute in his day, may be quoted. It relates to a small Italian landscape suffused with Cuypp-like sunshine, which was in the exhibition of Art Treasures held in Manchester in 1857, and which belonged to Mr. Entwistle, a Manchester banker:—
Few of, as the paucity of them, the following
Commis- note by Winstanley, an auctioneer of repute
sions in his day, may be quoted. It relates to
a small Italian landscape suffused with
Cuypp-like sunshine, which was in the exhibition of Art Treasures held in Manchester in 1857, and which belonged to Mr. Entwistle, a Manchester banker:—
“The San Marino view by Wilson was painted for John Hunter, the celebrated anatomist, in whose study it hung for many years. Wilson received twelve guineas for it, and often visited it in his later years.” This tends to confirm Callcott’s remarks. Winstanley adds that at Hunter’s sale the picture was bought by Mr. Spiers for forty-seven and a-half guineas. It next passed into the hands of Mr. George Townley of Bristol for 350 guineas, and later again changed hands for exactly the same amount. Winstanley, who dates this memorandum from Manchester, October 6th, 1813, gave 400 guineas for it, and Entwistle, presumably, had it from Winstanley.

Another famous Manchester Wilson was that already described—the upright view on the Arno, painted in 1760. This was painted on a panel over the drawing-room mantelpiece at Platt Hall, Manchester.

In Sight of Fortune

The price received by the artist for it was forty pounds.

A direct result of his infrequent employment was that Wilson was constantly driven from lodging to lodging, each change of abode representing a decrease in his slender resources, until at last it seemed that, save for some stroke of *Lodging to Lodging* fortune, he must perish miserably. As it happened, the stroke of fortune came. On the death of the brother who possessed the small estate at Llanverres, Wilson, who inherited the property, was enabled to change his cheerless London lodging for a fine retreat in Wales, where, amid scenes associated with his family name and his fame, he received from one worthy relative that care and sympathy which helped largely to console him for the City's pitiful neglect. But before this happened he was old and broken. His health had gone, and his touch and sight were failing. "Oh, these back settlements of mine!" he exclaimed, placing his hands on his loins as he took his leave in London of his old friend and patron, Sir William Beechey; and in a conversation with Holcroft, the dramatist, Beechey himself has shown us with what faltering hand his last pictures were painted. "Wilson," Holcroft tells us on the authority of Beechey, "used to make several attempts at each touch before his hand reached the precise place"; and

Richard Wilson, R.A.

in this manner some of his later landscapes remained several days on the easel with little apparent progress.

It is not, however, by any means certain—as it might perhaps be thought—that this dilatoriness was the result of frequent indulgence in the favourite pot of porter. A certain indolence was part of Wilson's temperament, and he seems in his later years to have grown indifferent to a world which, it must not be forgotten, had been a very long while indifferent to him. It is as though he had reasoned with himself that if he could not live by his art, then he would at least live for it; and, living for it, he cared little at last whether the world liked or disliked it. His pictures pleased him, and that fact alone is now accepted as sufficient evidence of their excellence. One may really be thankful, therefore, for the circumstances which tended to confirm him in his independence; which, having denied him fortune, made him a stranger to fashion; and which, driving him back on himself, made his personal love and knowledge of Art no less than of Nature his highest standard of excellence.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

The R.A.—The Academic style—Nationality in Art—A stylist—
Individuality—For charity's sake—Fraternity—The "Turk's
Head" Club—Librarian to the R.A.

THE story of the rise of the Royal Academy, though an oft-told tale, is one which gains in interest rather than loses, every time it is told. One goes *The R.A.* back in imagination to the time of Sir Joshua's presidency with something of the same delight that one feels in his pictures and those of the artists over whom he presided. The period which brought Wilson and Gainsborough, Romney, Hogarth, Cotes, and Dance and the rest of them so closely together as to make them a brotherhood—though not all within the Academic fold—is unique in social as in artistic interest. The Academy, under Sir Joshua, was as rare a society in the history of British painting as, in poetry, was that concourse of wits which, in an earlier era, gave immortality to the name of the "Mermaid." The individuals composing it were all in their several ways as

Richard Wilson, R.A.

rare as "rare" Ben Jonson and his merry associates in Elizabethan and Jacobean literature. There have been crafts, guilds, brotherhoods and other societies of artists brought together at various times in bonds more or less formal; but none has ever attained the same distinctiveness, or yet the same distinction, as that which characterizes the Royal Academy in England in the first quarter of a century of its long and brilliant history.

The eighteenth century generally was a charming period. Its fascination has been variously felt and very variously conveyed; but, from the side of its Art, its appeal is "to all and singular," as Dryden says; and to all and singular, accordingly, in the contemplation of its Art, "we bring a fancy of those Georgian days."

It is with the work of the early Academicians—the early British School of Art, as that work is commonly and distinctively characterized—that this fancy is most intimately associated. Though it is brought "to all and singular," not all and singular, perhaps, could quite say how it is that it is brought to them. To many, therefore, the following words in an article written by J. E. Hodgson, R.A., and the Secretary of the Royal Academy, will occur not inappropriately:—

"Those who frequent exhibitions and auction-rooms, though they may not have reasoned upon it, are aware



'View on the Wye.'



Nothing Like It

that in the depths of their consciousness there is a peculiar type which they associate with the art of Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Romney; and if chance brings them to a picture by Cotes, by Dance, by Wilson, or by Chamberlin, they recognize that type, and mentally associate

*The
Academic
Style*

those pictures with that art. They are affected in the first place by a sense of colour, of repose and dignity; then they become aware that there is very great economy of details, that the design always aims at grandeur, and when it fails to attain to it, falls back into meagreness; that the colouring aims at richness and depth, rather than brilliancy; that there are no strong contrasts, and that pure white is sparingly used. It is an art which is quite peculiar and which, once observed, can never be mistaken. It reminds one of other things, it recalls reminiscences of Flanders, of Venice, and of Rome; but in a vague and indistinct way—over and above these, presiding over, guiding and governing them, there is a distinct expression of nationality. This art has its definite position both in time and in space; it belongs to England and the latter half of the eighteenth century; no other age or country has ever produced anything like it.”¹

¹ J. E. Hodgson, R.A., and Fred A. Eaton, in the *Art Journal* vol. for 1891.

Richard Wilson, R.A.

This element of nationality is perhaps the most distinctive thing in the works of these masters.

Nationality in Art Wilson's Italian "compositions" seem as completely possessed of it as are the most simple landscapes of the purely English kind

depicted by Gainsborough. For although Italian at times in respect of their treatment—notably in their tendency towards formalism—no less than in respect of the actual scenes represented, Wilson's landscapes are not foreign to his sympathies. A Welshman by birth and breeding, Wilson was naturally addicted to a grander, wilder, more romantic scenery than his English brethren. His sympathies were Celtic, theirs were Saxon, yet his landscapes and theirs are not sharply divided, or harshly contrasted. They have that in common which not only assigns them to the same period in history, but to the same peculiarly isolated, and yet composite, nationality. Different as the Celt and the Saxon are in racial quality, they have shown, in art, a commingling far more wonderful than that which, in history, is expressed by the joint name of British. Their imaginative fusion has been greatly to the advantage of that element in the amalgam which, politically speaking, is allowed predominance. As Matthew Arnold has shown, if the Celts have failed themselves of any distinctive achievement in plastic art,

Feeling for Style

it is from excess, not want, of the artistic instinct, and the "dull, creeping" Saxons, have by historic contact with it greatly benefited by this Celtic superfluity. So greatly, in fact, has English art been affected by Celtism that, in its highest efforts, it reveals its indebtedness by its very impotence. Its charm and magic are the mark of this impotence; it is by their very failure to portray something more beautiful, that some English pictures appear so peculiarly, so mysteriously, one might almost say so bafflingly beautiful.

But in painting, as in all things else, no doubt, it is the pure English element in the composite British nationality which represents—with its more practical way—the larger measure of precise achievement. Bearing in mind, however, what the early English, or British, School owes to its peculiar style, one cannot forget that one source of style is undoubtedly Celtic. The feeling for style is not traditionally an inheritance from the Saxon, albeit the power of giving effect to it is distinctively British. The feeling itself is eminently Celtic. Having regard, therefore, to precise achievement only of the early British Masters, it seems quite impossible that the actual measure of it should be directly proportionate to the pure English element represented by them. One cannot, at all events, avoid the reflection that Richard Wilson, supreme amongst

Richard Wilson, R.A.

them as a stylist in landscape, was not English, but Welsh. And if it be said, moreover, that among the diverse elements most characteristic of the style of the early British school is a certain dignity, as well as grandeur and picturesqueness, shall it not be remembered that Wilson's qualities are these pre-eminently?

This much must be conceded to the "father of English landscape": he was, first and foremost among his associates, a stylist; and it is as *A Stylist* a stylist that his influence has been the greatest. With the grand and classical style, however, he combined the more modern feeling for external nature. He may be considered, in fact, a premature Turner, and by way of justification of his historic position little more than that, perhaps, would need to be said.

But as regards the source of Wilson's style and power, and of those of the early British Masters generally, while a great deal might be *Individuality* written on their complex nationality, much also might be attributed to their individuality. This, in its way, is as complex as their nationality. There is common to the painters of the Reynolds-Wilson-Gainsborough era that which may be described as a collective individuality. It is this that gives the group its peculiarity. As a school, the

Union out of Disunion

eighteenth-century Masters present greater contrasts, compared with other schools, than any of its several members present, compared with one another. Even Wilson and Gainsborough are of the same school of landscape !

Of this common character, in a school consisting of painters of such marked individuality, and so very varying degrees of power, it is not a little significant that all happened to be members of one common body. The Academy, whatever caprices have sometimes governed it in the matter of admission to membership, was at the outset an embodiment of the principle of fellowship which, as explained already, had been slowly making itself felt among artists generally. There was in the essential idea which led up to its foundation a real spirit of fraternity. Its actual genesis, it is true, was due to division, not union. The founders were seceders from an earlier society, the Incorporated Society of Artists of Great Britain. This earlier society, too, had, in its time, suffered internal differences which led to other but less momentous secessions. But the whole corporate movement amongst British artists, which began during the early part of the eighteenth century, and which by successive stages reached its final outcome in the Royal Academy in 1768, was at least significant of the growth of the feeling for unity ;

Richard Wilson, R.A.

it was at once a symbol and a symptom of that individuality which the eighteenth-century painters, notwithstanding their diversity, seemed when they came to maturity as the early British school of painting to possess in common.

Significant, too, is the fact that the first exhibition of the works of living British painters in the eighteenth century was undertaken in the cause of *For* charity. This was in 1760. First and fore-
Charity's most in connection with it must be mentioned
Sake the name of William Hogarth. His gift of his whole-length portrait of Captain Coram to the Foundling Hospital was an example which some of his fellows were prompt to emulate—most prominent amongst them being Richard Wilson. A collection of pictures was thus accumulated at the Hospital, and the idea was conceived of holding a public view of them.

Next, a public exhibition took place in the same year in the Strand at the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, and to this Wilson contributed his "Niobe," with two more landscapes. Smith, of Chichester, who so mortified Wilson by defeating him for the Royal Society's award of fame in landscapes, also sent three pictures; but of him it is unnecessary to say anything except that posterity has come to smile at the verdict of the Royal Society on his

Brotherhood of Artists

superior merits. But such, unfortunately, was poor Wilson's lot in life. Of the world's rewards he had practically none. An "indifferent dauber," to use Allan Cunningham's words, such as Barret, his friend, made at one time an income amounting to two thousand a year; while Wilson himself, in spite of the great reputation which the pictures he sent for exhibition brought him, lived to see the day when, in sheer despair, he inquired of Barret if he knew any one mad enough to employ a landscape-painter. It was in the cause of charity that the first exhibition to which Wilson contributed was held, but it was not long before this greatest of all the contributors to it was himself a fitting subject for charity.

The corporate movement, however, which produced the Royal Academy had as a primary object not charity but the encouragement of British Art, and incidentally, no doubt, the financial advantage of British artists. But as regards its final outcome, it is mainly interesting nowadays for a somewhat less practical, less prosaic, aspect. It had about it a certain social spirit, which, added to the picturesqueness that a band of men associated for artistic purposes was bound to give it, made it unique in the history of corporate movements. When the Royal Academy was founded, how diverse in ability as

Fraternity

Richard Wilson, R.A.

in personality were its members, and yet, on the whole, in what happy harmony they seemed to dwell! The lives of some of the "foundation" and other early Academicians afford an excellent picture of the social manners of the period. In addition to formal societies like the Royal Academy and its immediate predecessors, there were a number of lesser, but hardly less known, and certainly not less enjoyable gatherings. One famous rendezvous was the "Turk's Head," in Gerrard Street, Soho. Here various groups were in the habit of fore-gathering, and amongst them was a small and somewhat jovial set, of which Wilson was a member. The following account of the meetings, based as it is on the reminiscences of a contemporary—and an artist—is as good as may be:—

"Old Mr. Taylor, who copied the portrait after Mengs, under Wilson's own eye, says it was the custom, according to the social manner of the day, for himself, Wilson, Hayman, Dr. Chauncey, and other artists and gentlemen attached to literature and art, to hold a meeting or club at the 'Turk's Head,' in Gerrard Street, at which half a pint of wine was the allowance, and it was never observed that Wilson (however irregular on other occasions) was to be tempted to exceed this quantity. It was here that Hayman, one evening, rallying Wilson

*The
"Turk's
Head"
Club*



"Snowdon" (p. 141).



Bohemia

by assigning to him the palm of dissoluteness, was retorted upon by Dr. Chauncey, to whom he had appealed, by the reply, 'It must be confessed, Hayman, that what you say of Wilson would be true if you put yourself out of the question.'

The "Turk's Head" was especially celebrated, it appears, for two such clubs or societies as this. The one was literary, the other artistic; and, according to another contemporary account of the meetings, Wilson would appear to have been particularly prominent in the artistic body. He would, the account states, point out in his characteristic manner to some brother-artist any unknown member of the literary set who chanced to pass, by whispering, "There goes one of the Sapientia." At one of the meetings, according to the same account, Cosway, the miniature-painter, who had been at Court, attended in all the gay costume of the drawing-room, with pink heels to his shoes. But the room was so crowded he could not find a place. "What!" said Hayman, "can nobody make room for the little monkey?" At this Wilson laughed, and exclaimed: "Good G——d! how time and circumstances are changed; sure the world is turned topsy-turvy. Formerly the monkey rode the bear, but here we have the bear upon the monkey." This set the table in a roar, in which Hayman joined heartily, and rising,

Richard Wilson, R.A.

shook hands with Cosway, who received him with the greatest familiarity and politeness, and instantly every chair in the room was at his service.

Wilson, however, although undoubtedly delightfully companionable at times, was not always in this pleasant mood. His close companions were few, and it was not always that he enjoyed even their society. One friend whose society he seems to have sought in moments when he most felt his misfortunes, was an organist who kept a music-shop in Exeter 'Change—Willy Thompson by name. Wilson used frequently to repair to Thompson's stall of an evening, and there, as they sat smoking, talking, and drinking together, the music-seller would tune the painter, as Garrick—also a friend of Thompson—once observed, into a moral concord.

Poor Wilson had need of all the organist's tuning. His constant musings on the evil dispensations of the Fates to men of mind were only too well justified. His financial fortunes went from bad to worse, almost in direct proportion as his reputation increased. Had it not been, in fact, for his successful application for the post of librarian to the Royal Academy, one fails to see how he could have contrived to live until his good fortune in Wales, on the death of his brother came to him.

Librarian
to the R.A.

CHAPTER VIII.

LATER LIFE IN LONDON.

Covent Garden—Welsh scenes—A lucky escape—Delight in the open—A favourite haunt—Last London lodging—A pathetic story—Unfitted for success—Hoppner's view—Where Wilson failed—Celtic excess—Haggling with his Majesty—Offence averted—Proper perspective—Caricatures—The last sad scene.

THE first of Wilson's lodgings of which we have any account was on the north side of Covent Garden—the North Piazza, as it was then called. It is variously stated that he had apartments here before his Italian tour and after it. Thus

*Covent
Garden*

J. T. Smith, the author of the very interesting *Book for a Rainy Day*, which is the source of a number of anecdotes relating to the period, says in describing the portrait of his own great uncle, Admiral Smith, now in the Greenwich Gallery, that "it was painted by the celebrated Richard Wilson, the landscape-painter, previous to his visiting Rome, when he resided in the apartments on the north side of Covent Garden." He adds that the rooms were previously occupied first by Sir Peter Lely and then by Sir

Richard Wilson, R.A.

Godfrey Kneller. In this, however, he appears to have fallen into error. The house in which Wilson's rooms were was certainly the same as that in which Lely had lived from 1662 to 1680, and in which his collection was sold in 1667; but the place honoured by Sir Godfrey Kneller's presence—and, be it added, made a little notorious by his quarrel with Dr. Ratcliffe, which took place in its garden—was a house in the Little Piazza of Covent Garden, on the east side. Though Smith is thus at fault, however, in identifying Wilson's house with that of Kneller, he is probably accurate in the rest of his statement. Wilson may perhaps have had his quarters in the North Piazza before going to Italy, and may yet again have occupied the same apartments on his return. Both the district itself and the way in which Wilson's rooms were furnished accorded better perhaps with his circumstances before he went abroad—that is to say, before he devoted himself almost entirely to landscape—than with those which followed this momentous departure. Be that as it may, however, it seems generally agreed that on coming back from Italy it was in the North Piazza—and in Lely's old house—that Wilson set up his studio. In the same house, on the ground floor immediately under Wilson, Lock, the auctioneer, carried on his business. To his charge as an exhibitor of pictures by various artists it

Covent Garden

is interesting to recall that Hogarth committed his "Marriage à la Mode" as a desperate chance of securing a possible purchaser. An interesting relic of Wilson, had it happily been preserved for us, would have been a model of the Piazza which he caused to be made, and which he used as a receptacle for his painting materials. It was not the fate of this artistic contrivance, however, to be bequeathed to posterity to serve Wilson's memory, but—it may be conjectured—rather to be disposed of by him, in the evil times awaiting him, to supply his immediate necessities.

It was very probably during his tenure of his Covent Garden rooms that Wilson painted some of his Welsh and English scenes, visiting his own home and the adjoining counties for the purpose.

*Welsh
Scenes*

To the period 1760-68 appear to belong his "Carnarvon Castle," "Snowdon," and "A View near Chester." His presence in the vicinity was, no doubt, the source of the commission in 1760 to paint the view on the Arno which, as already described, adorned a panel over the mantelpiece in the drawing-room of Platt Hall, Manchester.

Into the country round about London he made many excursions, his favourite haunts being apparently the Thames near Richmond, Hounslow Heath and Islington. His view of the river just below Richmond,

Richard Wilson, R.A.

which was in the Ford Collection, is a wonderful study in the concentration of light on the stream and in the sweep of the lines described by the river banks. His interest in this riverside scenery generally is shown by two other pictures which must be specially mentioned here—namely, “View of the River in the Princess’s Garden at Kew” and “Sion House.”

Of Hounslow Heath there was a sketch in the Ford Collection which was particularly interesting from the circumstance that Wilson made it in the presence of his friend Paul Sandby. Unfortunately—as the event might have proved for him—there was another occasion on which Wilson was alone when sketching in the same locality. The story goes that, finding him unaccompanied, a highwayman lay in wait for the artist, and that Wilson only saved himself and the precious results of his labours by his ready wit. On being threatened, he showed his sketches and remarked that they were all he had come out for and that he usually only got a very small sum for them on his return to London. He had thus little difficulty in persuading the bandit that it was not worth while to rob him, whereupon the fellow left him.

Another adventure which befel him and which might have had direst consequences may be related here, although it happened in Italy. I have never seen it

Averted Sacrifice

recounted before, but my authority for it is Sandby in a letter he wrote to a friend in the West Indies. Referring to the dangers incident to too great enthusiasm in the making of pictures, Sandby tells his friend how "Mr. Wilson," while in Italy, was taken for some magician by the ignorant peasantry. They watched him at work in the open as he was sketching Castle Godolfi, and were so amazed at his exploit that they could only account for it by supernatural influences. They accordingly proposed to sacrifice him "to the honour of God," and were proceeding to carry out the proposal when, fortunately for the artist, the parish priest, hearing the clamour, put in an appearance. As he happened to possess some knowledge of painting, he duly used his authority with his superstitious parishioners to secure the painter's freedom.

No doubt Wilson's personal attitude to nature and his delight in the open country, as well as the love of sketching, made solitary excursions particularly enjoyable to him. It was on account of its nearness to the country, in fact, and for the sake of the fine view to be had out towards Highgate and Hampstead, that his next London lodging after the Covent Garden apartments seems to have been chosen by him. He took a lease

*A Lucky
Escape*

*Delight in
the Open*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

of a house in Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, because, as he is said to have remarked, "there is no building north interposed between us and the open country." Allan Cunningham states that at the time when he wrote his account of Wilson there were still to be seen on the site of the house in Charlotte Street two spacious arches blocked up with brick. These bricked-up spaces were once occupied by windows, that on the first floor lighting the great painter's show-room, the other his studio. The house was numbered 36, and though it has long since been demolished, it has not yet passed out of record. It lives, like Lely's house in Covent Garden, in its associations. After Wilson, Woollett the renowned engraver of his works, came to live there, and at a later date Constable became an inhabitant of Charlotte Street. It was in a kind of outhouse at the end of the garden of number 36, according to Cunningham, that some of the finest efforts of Wilson's hand were executed. Wilson was always most careful about natural lighting. He prepared his palette, says Cunningham, made a few touches, then retired to the window to refresh his eye with natural light, and returned in a few minutes and resumed his labours. Thus it would appear to have been for the sake of its fuller lighting that, while he remained at Charlotte Street, he made use of this



"Lake Avernus."



Golden Prospect

building which stood by itself at the end of the garden.

Near to the house was a roped walk between fine rows of elm trees, and there Wilson would often walk with his friend Barret. Or perhaps on a fine evening he would sit and enjoy the prospect of the open country from one of his windows. He would throw open the

*A
Favourite
Haunt*

casement and invite whatever friend happened to be free at the moment to accept the invitation to come in and sit and watch with him the golden glow of sunset over the hills of Highgate. The outlook now from Charlotte Street is, of course, very different. Heath and hilltop are shut out from the view and the light of sunset there is no longer golden, but through the denser atmosphere of innumerable thoroughfares it is seen rather as fire. Wilson's evening effects are always admirable, but in his local landscapes it seems generally that the light falls, even as the dew falls, softly and silently. There is, it is true, an Italian view of his showing Rome in the distance under a glare of sunset. This, however, is quite unusual with him. As a rule, though he had fire in his genius, it was not thus that he expressed it. Least of all did the living city suggest it. London in his day was in itself different from what it is nowadays: the sunsets he

Richard Wilson, R.A.

loved to gaze on from his window in Charlotte Street were not crimson-hued and smoke-hung like those which Turner looked on after him.

Turner, by-the-by, it is interesting to recall, worked for a time in Bolsover Street—Norton Street it used to be called—in which Wilson had lived some time or other after quitting Charlotte Street. The name of yet another painter connected with the same street is that of Wilkie. In the eighteenth century the place seems to have had some little pretension. In 1796 the funeral of Sir William Chambers, the architect, who must have been known to Wilson as an original member, like him, of the Royal Academy, started thence for the Abbey.

Wilson's last London lodging was in Tottenham Street, Fitzroy Square. When he took up his quarters there—at what date it is not known—he must have been near the end of his resources. It seems to have been the poorest of all his lodgings—indeed, it could not have been poorer, if such accounts of it as have been preserved are accurate. His belongings had been reduced to the scantiest ; he had little furniture and no superfluity even of bedclothes. He had been wandering from lodging to lodging during twenty years or so, for besides Norton Street, he is known to have lived in Foley Street, in Great Queen Street, and at 85 Great

Dark before Dawn

Tichfield Street, Marylebone. At the last-named of these addresses William Collins, the painter, father of the novelist, was born in 1787.

Some idea of Wilson's plight may be had from the fact that on at least one occasion he was forced to decline a commission because he could not afford to buy himself the necessary materials.

A Pathetic

Story

The story told is that an aspiring young painter recommended Wilson to a lady who wished to possess herself of some original pictures but did not know, apparently, whom to entrust with the painting of them. The young gentleman conducted her to Wilson's studio for a personal interview on the subject. The artist listened to her as politely as possible in the mortifying circumstances, but as she was turning to go, after explaining her requirements, he gently pulled her attendant to one side and said to him, "Young man, your kindness is all in vain!" It seems strange that this should have been so. One would have thought that on the strength of the lady's commission all necessary materials for its execution would have been forthcoming somehow. But presumably Wilson's credit was as low as his cash. The pawnbrokers appear to have been for some considerable time his only regular patrons; but there were limits even to their patronage. "Why, look'ee, Dick," one

Richard Wilson, R.A.

of these accommodating gentlemen once explained to him on being asked to assist him, "you know I am always willing to oblige, but——" and he thereupon showed the artist the products of his toil piled into a heap in a corner! No wonder the youth with the artistic propensities who had recommended Wilson to the lady in search of pictures took warning by the artist's pathetic words to him. It is said that, abandoning all hope as a painter, the young man gave up the palette, took once more to his books, joined a college at Oxford and, becoming ordained, settled down to a position as an obscure country parson. Whatever the piety of such a resolute action, there is no disputing its prudence, and in any case its success cannot be grudged to the youth who admired and befriended poor Richard Wilson.

There can be no doubt that Wilson was unfitted for success. Personal reasons alone would have precluded the possibility of his attaining worldly prosperity so far as it depended on himself to attain it. His manners were unaccommodating, he was unyielding and uncompromising. On this point Edward Edwards has some just remarks in the *Anecdotes of Painters*. "This neglect," he writes, "might probably result from his own conduct; for it must be confessed that Mr. Wilson was not very

*Unfitted
for Success*

Was he his own Enemy?

prudentially attentive to his interests, and though a man of strong sense and superior education to most of the artists of his time, he certainly did not possess that suavity of manners which distinguished many of his contemporaries. On this account his connections and employment insensibly diminished and left him, in the latter part of his life, in comfortless infirmity."

Hoppner, in an article reviewing the *Anecdotes* in the first number of the *Quarterly*, retorts upon the author these very "prudential" considerations with the want of which Edwardes charges Wilson. *Hoppner's*

"The truth is," he says, "the connoisseurs *View* and the artists never agreed on the merits of Wilson; and Mr. Edwardes has therefore cautiously steered through these opposing interests." Personally, however, I prefer Edwardes's account of the matter to Hoppner's. As a matter of fact, there was in Wilson's lifetime, as there is to-day, but one general opinion among recognized authorities as to Wilson's excellence. As Hoppner himself says, almost in the same breath, the principles on which true Art is founded being immutable, it can neither be affected by the blindness of ignorance nor the new lights of fashion, and however they might lament his "unsuavity" it was still absurd in Wilson's contemporaries to forego the

Richard Wilson, R.A.

pleasure of possessing his works and encumber themselves with those of Barret.

Setting aside prejudice, Wilson's merit has never been seriously and successfully disputed. Though in his highest efforts some suspicion of failure is inevitable, there is at the same time implied in them a measure of accomplishment of which the worst that has ever been said, in effect, is that it is less than it might have been. Even Reynolds, in his strictures—the severest ever passed on any of Wilson's paintings—on “Niobe,” was, it is clear, speaking in studied language, seemingly designed to anticipate some pretty general exception to his criticism.

Where Wilson failed was just the point at which most British artists have failed—only in him the shortcoming is more apparent than in others, because of the greater grandeur and elevation of his style. Matthew Arnold has traced the failure to achieve the highest perfection in plastic art to a Celtic influence in us, and what he says on the subject, with special reference to Reynolds and Turner, in his *Celtic Literature*, may, I think, be said not without justice of our greatest Celtic painter. Matthew Arnold shows that it is the natural mark of the Celt to be spiritually elevated—to err, indeed, on the side of spirit and to fail from excess of

The Unattainable

it. This is a tendency which he traces down from its Celtic source to the work of the greatest portraitist and the greatest landscapist of the British school. The grace and beauty of Reynolds and the magic charm of Turner suggest the respective degree in which each falls short of ideal achievement. Both fail in expression, because they attempt to express, indeed, the inexpressible. This it is which has given Turner his "stamp mark of insanity"; in the opinion of Continental critics at least he fails, as British artists generally fail, in *Architectonicé*, in the highest expressive power of art. This is the limitation which is seen in Wilson in his ambitious pictures, such as the "Niobe." These fail, when judged by the standard of their own splendid intention, to represent Wilson truly. Their failure is on the side of execution, however, not of idea and conception. And it is essentially the Celtic failure of which Matthew Arnold spoke. The ideal, the goal, is unattained in them because unattainable.

This elevation, this Celtic excess, affected Wilson's life as well as his art. There was a want of steadiness in his temperament, a kind of "gay defiance" in him which made light of realities, even if it did not spurn them. It revealed itself, not in indulgence or recklessness, but in a constant

*Celtic
Excess*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

readiness to revolt against reality. He could not accommodate himself to circumstances. Not only so, but he must feel himself highly incensed at the very idea of doing so. His contempt of the well-meant advice of some of his fellow-artists, headed by Edward Penny, to devote himself to a lighter style of landscape-painting, is a practical instance. Such an attitude could not but make many enemies. Even Reynolds's urbanity might have found ground for offence in him. It is by no means certain, indeed, that the President ever actually withheld his friendship, and even his patronage, from Wilson; but it was no doubt only his forbearance which prevented open rupture.

It seems to have been Wilson, at any rate, who was responsible for at least one cause of difference. Shortly after his return from Italy, where he appears to have been on good terms with Reynolds, it is said that Wilson requested a favour of Sir Joshua which he ought hardly to have expected even a close friend to grant him. He asked permission to place some of his pictures in a show-room which Reynolds had built for himself. Here they would be seen, of course, chiefly by Sir Joshua's patrons, and though there was no question of competition—if, indeed, Wilson had already abandoned portraiture for professional purposes—the request was none the less

*An Un-
reasonable
Request*



"Lake Nemi."



Friction with Reynolds

inconsiderate. Perhaps Wilson had in mind the treatment which had been freely extended to him in Italy by Zuccarelli and Vernet; but it makes all the difference, surely, whether a favour is offered or whether it is asked for! There seems no authority for the statement that Wilson asked for the use of Reynolds's show-room except the *Library of Fine Arts* (iii. 459). The story seems, however, not improbable. But that Wilson retained a number of his early acquaintances until almost the close of his life is not, perhaps, more to their credit, generally, than it is to his. Yet there is evidence enough that though he had social qualities—joviality, a turn for caustic humour, and a certain easy-going indolence—which no doubt secured him not a few companions, these were natural advantages which were more than matched by sensitiveness, and which, owing to continual poverty, were too often mistaken in him, by the bitterest of ironies, for the marks of an unrefined intellect.

It required tact and sympathy to deal justly with Wilson. The well-known dispute with Lord Bute, acting for King George III., over the price for the Sion House picture is an indication of the extent to which justifiable pride may have lost him valuable patronage. Wilson asked Lord Bute sixty guineas for the picture. When

*Haggling
with his
Majesty*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

his Lordship demurred to this, the artist replied that if his Majesty could not manage the sum all at once, he might pay it by instalments! There, of course, was the end of negotiations; and it is at least possible that Wilson similarly offended at Court on some earlier occasion. He had been in a fair way once to secure favour there. Before he went to Italy he had painted at least two portraits of George III., and he could quite conceivably have made use of the privilege to his further advantage, had he studied to do so. His sister was an attendant on a lady who was well known at Court and held an official appointment there, and Wilson no doubt might have profited by the circumstance.

Knowing his susceptibility, some one or two of Wilson's closest friends used to study to avoid giving ground for the least offence. Sandby, in *Offence* buying pictures from him, used to pretend *Averted* that he did so not from charity, but because he could find a market for them. The result was, of course, that he had on hand, after a time, a whole collection of Wilson landscapes. These, however, it is some satisfaction to know, were in the possession of Sandby's nephew still when the great painter's worth began to be better appreciated. Sir William Beechey, one of Wilson's latest friends, studied him equally

Danger Signals

judiciously. He once asked him to dinner, and in accepting the invitation Wilson referred to the fact that Sir William had daughters and asked him, "Do they draw, Sir William?" adding that most young ladies were in the habit of doing so. Sir William merely replied that his daughters were musical. His reason for avoiding the question was perhaps the danger he saw in a discussion on such a subject with a guest like Wilson, especially when it was broached by the uninitiated. Wilson's readiness to take offence at remarks, however casual, which seemed to reflect on his merits, is well shown in an anecdote told by Barret. In a letter of his to the Dilettanti Society, Barret wrote: "I remember meeting Mr. Wilson one day looking over a collection of pictures at Prestage's auction-rooms. On his pointing out, with much enthusiasm, some excellence in the middle distance of a picture to which he wished to direct my attention, 'Yes, yes, very true, I heartily agree with you,' said I; 'surely there's no man living who is able to paint a landscape of so much excellence!' Though this was said almost laughingly, yet I saw his countenance lower like a tempest gathering on his own Snowdon." Wilson, it would seem from this, could even when conscious of his own special powers be a warm admirer of the work of other artists. A younger contemporary whose work

Richard Wilson, R.A.

he especially appreciated, and for whom he felt a close personal attachment, was Wright of Derby. The story is well known how when Wright proposed an exchange of pictures Wilson, agreeing to the suggestion, answered, in allusion to his own and Wright's distinctive excellences, "Yes, Wright, I will give you air and you shall give me fire!"

For this atmospheric effect and aerial perspective Wilson rightly kept a most jealous eye. His air is at times no doubt a little too heavy—indeed, it is positively oppressive—for it was the air, very largely, of the Roman Campagna. In this, as in other respects, however, Wilson had always an eye to the poetic truth of suggestion, representing not the details in their literal accuracy, but the general character of the scenery, and appealing not to the eye but to the heart and the intellect. If, therefore, there are some of his works—and those the most representative—which he invests thus with an atmosphere suggestive of his own solemnity, there are others in which he dispels this gloom, replacing it with noontide sunshine, and revealing points of affinity in his atmospheric qualities to De Hooze and to Berchem. Wilson had studied Dutch and Flemish Masters, I imagine, at Rome even while seeking the sources which inspired Rosa and Claude and the Poussins, and even before

With Eyes, not with Nose

that, indeed, he had already the influence of Rembrandt upon him from his portrait period. At successive stages a trace of one or other of these different Masters is to be seen in his colouring. In the peculiar quality of his light and air, however, as in his rendering of distances, he cannot be said to have been a pupil to anybody, but he appears as his own master always.

This he was fully aware of; hence his remark to Wright and his wounded pride at the praises which Barret gave to the picture at Prestage's auction-rooms. And just as Wilson him-
Proper Perspective
self was at pains to produce this excellence, so he was anxious that spectators should not fail to observe it. He was most particular about the distance at which they stood from the canvas, fearing, else, that his perspective might be lost upon them. He worked standing at his easel, the more easily to retire from it at the successive touches to the canvas. He agreed apparently with Gainsborough, who, in this matter of the distance at which to look at a picture, once quoted Kneller to the effect that paint was not laid on "to smell of," only Wilson's remarks were entirely original. "There!" he exclaimed, as he drew Sir William Beechey, who had just called upon him, into the farthest corner of the studio, "look at my landscape—this is

Richard Wilson, R.A.

where you should view a painting if you wish to examine it with your eyes and not with your nose."

Beechey's account of Wilson's process of painting has been preserved for us, together with this anecdote.

Process of Painting It has been unearthed from an overlooked account of Wilson in *The Builder*, of December 5th, 1863.

It is part of the account which Holcroft, as already stated, claimed to have had directly from Beechey. From this, it appears that the colours on Wilson's palette did not exceed four, and that his common menstruum was linseed oil, instead of other oils eight or ten times as dear. While engaged on a picture, Wilson would turn from his easel to the window, make whimsical remarks on the passengers, pause to recollect himself, and begin painting again. According to the same authority, Wilson took every opportunity to escape to his favourite indulgence—the pot of porter—and his nose in consequence became red and irritable, the large handkerchief which he kept always at his breast being constantly applied to it.

This only failing of Wilson's, and the unfortunate evidence it left upon his features, could not, of course, escape the attention of the humorists.

Caricatures They were made the occasion of more than one caricature. Zoffany in his well-known

Death

picture of the original Academicians, was seized with the happy but impertinent idea of showing Wilson with the familiar pewter at his elbow, but he judiciously painted out so offensive a suggestion when it became known to him that Wilson not only resented it, but was prepared to lay his resentment upon Zoffany's shoulders. Even this threat, however, which Wilson allowed to circulate, did not command from everybody the desired respect which it won from Zoffany. Even "Peter Pindar," in his ode to the Royal Academicians, notwithstanding his assurance of future fame for Wilson and his respect for his honesty, did not forget to describe him as "red-nosed Wilson"; and Sir George Beaumont, in a sketch of Wilson, also satirized this part of his physiognomy. Sir George's sketch was afterwards traced by Hastings and reproduced as the frontispiece to his book of etchings from Wilson's pictures.

Wilson, however, was probably beyond the reach of praise and blame when "Peter Pindar" thus apportioned them, and he certainly was so when Sir George's caricature was published. He died on May 15th, 1782, in his loved haunt at Llanverres. He had retired thither only in 1780, so that he had scarcely time, even if he had had the vigour, to taste fully of his fortune. This was doubly pathetic, for the benefits flowing from his inheritance were, it

*The Last
Sad Scene*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

seems, twofold. Not only was the district in which the estate was situated the part of the land he loved best, but a vein of lead was discovered upon it which must enormously have increased its value. He passed away at Colomendie, where he had spent those two years almost entirely in the house and under the care of his relative, Mrs. Jones-Garnons. Cunningham's account of it is, like his memoir of Wilson throughout, excellent. "The house," he says, "was elegant and commodious, and the situation of that kind which Wilson loved. It stood among fine green hills with old romantic woods, picturesque rocks, verdant lawns, deep glens; and the whole was cheered with the sound as well as the sight of running waters."

As to the manner of his end, it is said that he had strolled into the grounds and made his way to his accustomed haunt beneath a fir-tree, when he suddenly fell, and being unable to rise again, might have been left to die there had it not been for the sagacity of his only companion, a dog, which was a favourite with him. The animal ran back barking to the house, and thus drew attention to the spot where the great painter lay prostrate. He was removed to the house, where he lingered for a day or two. His grave, which is next to that of his father, the Reverend John Wilson, in the churchyard of St. Mary-at-Mold, is in the form of an altar-tomb.



"English Landscape."



CHAPTER IX.

WILSON'S PLACE IN ART.

Father of British landscape—A mistaken challenge—Seeing and feeling—Subjectivity and Objectivity—Actual landscape—Not a popular painter—Generous fellow-artists—Prevalent opinion—The true note—Entirely original—"The English Claude"—Steeped in antiquity—Ennobling treatment—Strange misconception—Unequal work—The final tribute.

IN determining Wilson's place in Art, regard must be had, in the first place, to his right to be called the father of British landscape. This title has been sometimes claimed for Gainsborough. It is pointed out that although Wilson was thirteen years Gainsborough's senior, he was still painting portraits at a time when Gainsborough, albeit imperfectly, had revealed his hand in landscape; and it is urged that whereas Ruskin, who is Wilson's champion for the honour of being called the discoverer of sincere landscape art, mentions a quiet pencil-drawing of a sunset at Rome in support of the claim for the Welshman, the East Anglian painter had

*Father of
British
Landscape*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

already to his credit at the time that that drawing was produced—about 1750—such a representation of English scenery as “Great Cornard Wood” (in the National Gallery in London). Moreover, the fact that Italy was the source of Wilson’s inspiration in his first notable efforts in the direction of landscape must, it is contended, put him out of account as a painter of his native scenery.

This challenge to Wilson is, however, mistaken. If the case were allowed to rest where the author of *A Mistaken Modern Painters* has been content to leave it, Gainsborough’s claim perhaps might be allowed to prevail. The argument may, however, be carried very much farther. It is not a matter, in the first place, of determining when and where the two rival Masters produced their earliest landscapes; and even if it were, the claim in favour of Gainsborough would rest first on supposition, and next on want of discrimination. There is no ground whatever, except pure assumption, for the statement that Wilson’s drawings and landscape pictures were all done in Italy or after his return to England, and that they were all later, therefore, than the year 1749. The facts are wholly in favour of the view, not that Wilson went to Italy to paint portraits, and to discover only accidentally an inherent power of

Precedence in Landscape

landscape, but that his journey was undertaken simply because that power was already known to him, and because he saw quite clearly that only in classic surroundings could it be brought to maturity. It is even possible that, as Sir Walter Armstrong suggests in his great work on Gainsborough, the younger man had, so far from anticipating the elder in landscape-painting, actually felt his power and momentarily tried to emulate it. But even ignoring possibilities and looking only at facts, Wilson's claim to precedence in the landscape art of England is beyond serious question. Conceding the dates of Gainsborough's earliest landscapes as points in the Suffolk Master's favour, there remain considerations of the degree of style and power shown in these productions, as compared with those attained by Wilson in his most nearly corresponding landscape studies. Here it cannot but be admitted that while Gainsborough was a tyro, Wilson achieved real mastery. Ruskin's praise of Wilson for his pencil-drawing at Rome cannot exactly be transferred to Gainsborough for any of his early paintings, even allowing for the circumstance that they are done with the brush and not with the pencil. Even in "Great Cornard Wood," perfect and delightful as that landscape is in its quiet harmony of colouring, Gainsborough was under the influence of a close study of the Dutchmen, and no one pretends that that work

Richard Wilson, R.A.

represents him in the highest and freest developments of his own native genius. With Wilson's first known works in landscape it is otherwise. He, it is true, studied Italian masters as Gainsborough Dutch, but of his independence of them the words of Ruskin are eloquent. "Here, at last," he says, "we feel is an honest Englishman, who has got away out of all the Camere, and the Loggie, and the Stanze, and the Schools, and the Disputas, and the Incendios, and the Battaglios, and busts of this god, and torsos of that, and the chatter of the studio, and the rush of the Corso;—and has laid himself down with his own poor eyes and heart, and the sun casting its light between ruins,—possessor, he, of so much of the evidently blessed peace of things,—he and the poor lizard in the cranny of the stones beside him."

If Wilson felt as well as saw like that, what does it matter if he felt and saw in Italy or England? To see and feel was the great thing, and that was what Wilson was the first landscapist to do.

Seeing and Feeling His finest pictures are undoubtedly those representing Italy, or subjects associated with Italy, and when he painted in England he was still under the spell of Italian influence. It is not true, however, to say that he saw English scenery with the eyes of the painters of the Campagna di Roma, in the same sense

Seeing Eye

as Gainsborough saw the woods and pastures of his native Suffolk in his early landscapes with the eyes of the masters of Dutch scenery. Wilson, being a Welshman, belonged to a racial tradition—high, grand, and tragical—which related him far more truly to the Italian Masters than East Anglian, or even English, tradition can be said to have related Gainsborough to Dutch or Flemish exemplars. Wilson may have approached his subjects with a certain pre-conceived attitude recalling Claude or the Poussins, but that was simply because the way of looking at nature adopted by Claude or the Poussins was quite natural to him. He made their tradition his own, and all that he saw in the scenery which they had painted before him he saw newly and freshly, and saw “with his own poor eyes and heart.” Therefore, even if it were true that he saw only Italy, he would still rightly be regarded as the artist with whom in Britain sincere landscape art may be said to have had its beginning.

There is, however, another consideration. Apart from his subjective attitude, Wilson's claim to precedence, historically, is a perfectly good one. It is not only a question, as between him and Gainsborough, of the sincerity of feeling which each had for nature, nor of the extent to which each was dependent on, or independent

Subjectivity
and
Objectivity

Richard Wilson, R.A.

of, his particular foreign exemplars; it is not, above all, a question of the respective kind of scenery, Italian or English, which each sought to embody, but it is a question simply of the degree and manner in which each *did* embody scenery. While it is true that Wilson "saw himself in all he saw," and while to some extent he selected the things he saw under the very spell of that shadow which his own attitude cast on them, still there was a very great deal besides himself that he invariably saw. His subjectivity is by no means so whole as is that of Gainsborough; and hence, perhaps, the ultimate reason why he is not so great an artist as Gainsborough. Historically, however, it is this very inferiority which gives him precedence. There is the same consideration in this respect in landscape-painting as in descriptive poetry. Mere naturalistic writing, which reflects a more or less objective attitude, would have given precedence to *The Seasons*, for instance, in the historic order of the development of a school of nature-poetry over, say, such profounder utterances as the *Lyrical Ballads*, even had James Thomson not been prior in actual time to Wordsworth and his collaborator in the ballads, Coleridge. On this analogy, the British school of landscape must be said to have reached its highest development in Turner, the nearest counterpart to whom in literature is Shelley. But between the

Closeness to Nature

nature-poetry of Thomson and that of Shelley there is a difference by comparison with which the distance separating Turner from Richard Wilson becomes quite insignificant. Nothing better, in fact, can be said to establish Wilson's claim to be the founder of real landscape-painting than the fact that Turner had studied him. The effect of the study is obvious. In some of the pictures of Turner's early middle period it is plain enough to suggest imitation. And the sufficient reason for this closeness of Turner to Wilson is to be found in Wilson's closeness to nature—his objectivity.

If for this quality alone, Wilson must be allowed to rank in preference to Gainsborough as the founder of a school of actual landscape. In respect of their objectivity, Wilson's landscapes, one *Actual Landscape* and all, are delineations of nature in a sense in which Gainsborough's very seldom are. He may less frequently than Gainsborough have painted in actual presence of the scene he was depicting; he may have had less regard to the precise thing to be represented and more to the finished picture; he may have composed, in a word, when both Gainsborough and Constable would have been content with Nature's own arrangement; but the imitative truth in him is not on that account less than it is in Gainsborough. It is, on

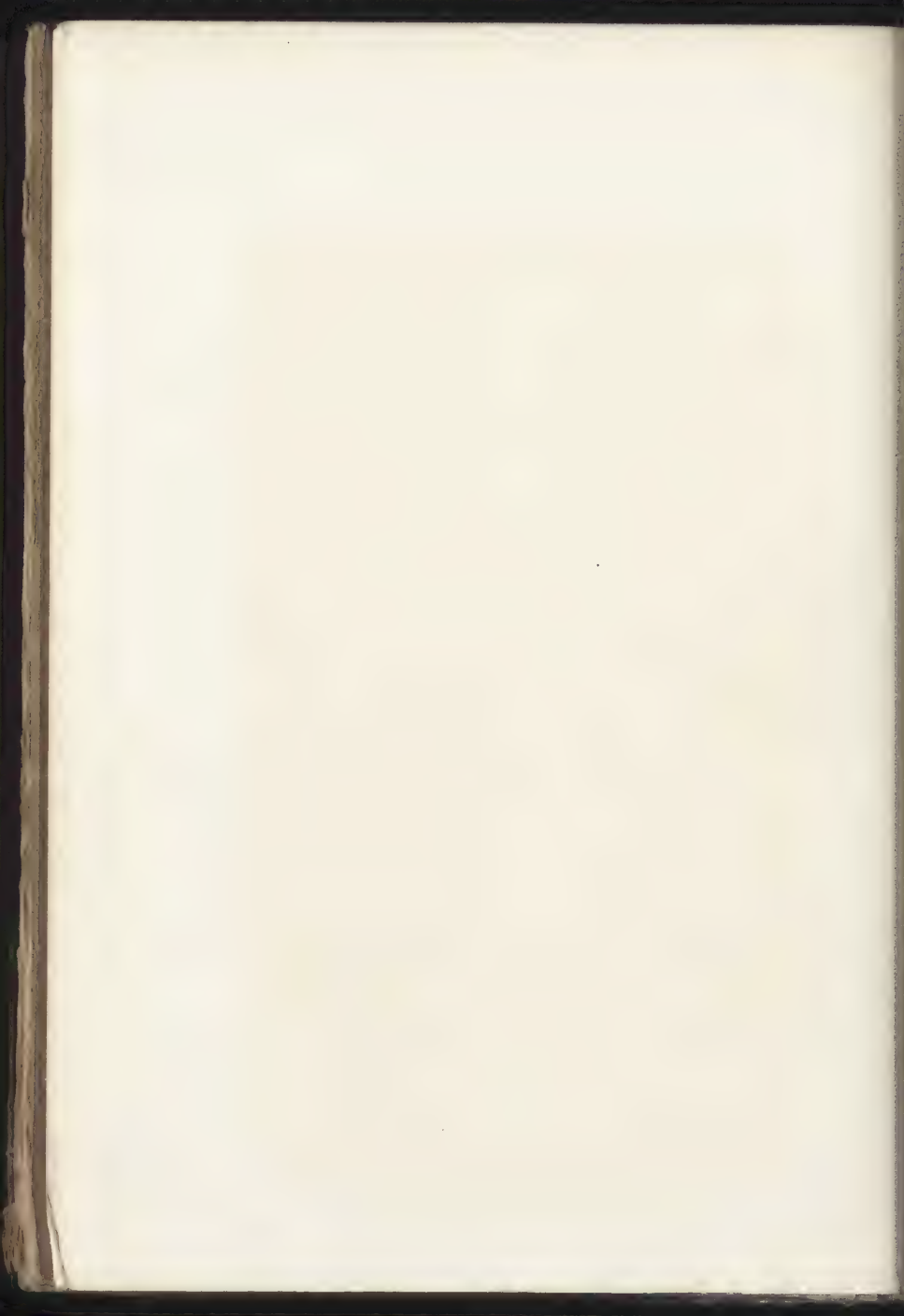
Richard Wilson, R.A.

the contrary, greater. He has never the pretext for his own self-expression that Gainsborough has, but his skies, rocks, and rivers, his air and the distribution of his light and shade, his plains and mountains, and the very forms of his trees and tints of his verdure are far more than in Gainsborough of the actual shape and semblance of the same things in nature. In his ærial quality, if in none other of his many natural excellences, Wilson advanced the art of landscape-painting towards that stage of the relationship with living nature in which it now is, to a degree compared with which Gainsborough, with all his immense superiority, considered subjectively, can hardly be said to have advanced it to any degree at all. Wilson, in his selection and treatment of natural objects, was as objective a painter as Gainsborough was subjective. Gainsborough, for the very reason that he is so subjective, is the greater artist; but, for that very reason also, he did not do more than—he did not do so much as—did Richard Wilson to prepare the way for successive artists of the British school of landscape. The attempt to take from Wilson and to give to Gainsborough the proud title of the father of that school must fail entirely.

Yet, proud as his title is, Wilson's place in Art is not a popular one. There are few painters, indeed, who



"Bridge of Augustus at Rimini."



Painters' Painter

have been more admired by the few and at the same time more neglected by the many. It will be seen from the Appendices given at the end of this volume that Wilson's own proud confidence in the future worth of his works, when those of many of his successful rivals would have become all but valueless, has been amply vindicated. Yet the highest values recorded, including only a few as high as a thousand guineas, show that the demand for his pictures has at all times been limited. His work, in fact, seems by its very nature unlikely ever to command general enthusiasm: he is strictly a painters' painter.

*Not a
Popular
Painter*

As such, however, he may be well content. Artists are almost unanimous in admiration of him; and if his pictures are now not destined to be popular, it must be said, on the other hand, that they have been subjected in the past to but little actual disapproval.

Even in his own day the sore straits that Wilson was for so long reduced to were not entirely the result of any adverse criticism. He had generous enough recognition from almost all his fellow-artists whose opinions were at all worth noticing, and his inability to dispose of his pictures or obtain commissions for painting them, though it shows a deplorable want of public taste

*Generous
Fellow-
Artists*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

at the time, does not point to incapacity on the part either of critics or of connoisseurs. From some one or two of his immediate rivals Wilson had better treatment professionally than even superior genius had the right to expect of them. Zuccarelli and Vernet have, in this respect, earned a juster celebrity than that accruing from their paintings. On the other hand, of course, there is the famous episode of the meeting of artists at which Sir Joshua Reynolds, in referring to Gainsborough as the greatest living landscape-painter, provoked the retort from Wilson, "Yes, and the greatest portrait-painter, too." Even if, however, the President's words must be taken as a malicious thrust at Wilson, they must also show him to have been fully alive to Wilson's merits. But from the fact that the President apologized to Wilson after this little incident, it would appear that his remark was due more to inadvertency than to positive enmity; and there is no reason to suppose that Sir Joshua's act of forgetfulness was more than momentary, and that it was seriously intended to reflect on Wilson.

The well-known Academy discourse is, perhaps, a different matter. Delivered after Wilson was dead, it cannot, certainly, be taken as in any way friendly to him. It is, however, to say the least of it, possible that the criticism passed by the President on the

Reynolds's Criticism

famous "Niobe" picture was the result not of close study of that work itself, but as Edward Edwards suggests, of a print engraved from the first of the several pictures which Wilson painted on the subject. This first copy was the one which came later into the possession of Sir George Beaumont; and though the difference of treatment in it is not such as would call for a wholly different criticism from that due to Wilson's other "Niobes," still it is to some extent a different picture; and if it is the case that Reynolds had not even seen this copy, but only a print from it, there seems some reason for thinking that his observations on the subject may perhaps have done an injustice to his critical faculty, if they are understood to apply to the best "Niobe" picture—the one, namely, which was executed for the Duke of Cumberland and which came afterwards into the possession of the Duke of Gloucester.

But Reynolds's strictures, in any case, were not as severe as they might have been. They represent, in fact, simply the general body of opinion which is still prevalent about Wilson—*Prevalent Opinion* opinion based on tradition instead of study and sympathy. Even Ruskin, in *Modern Painters*, has shown a misconception very similar to Sir Joshua's. Reynolds remarks that in order to handle a subject

Richard Wilson, R.A.

like "Niobe" properly the painter must possess a mind like that of Poussin, "naturalized in antiquity," and he goes on to compare what he calls Wilson's "substantial and unimaginative Apollo" with the "cloudy-charioted Apollo in Poussin's 'Cephalus and Aurora.'" Wilson, in short, according to the President, had not a "mind naturalized in antiquity"; and in much the same way Ruskin considers that Wilson's "originality was overpowered." He was "corrupted," he considers, "by study of the Poussins" and by "gathering his material chiefly in their field, the district about Rome"; and, accordingly, "his pictures are in general mere diluted adaptations from Poussin and Salvator." Yet although Ruskin thus followed the tradition started by Reynolds in his attitude to Wilson, he very largely modified it. Even the passages referring to Wilson in *Modern Painters* are interspersed with expressions giving him credit for painting in a manly way, and for reaching occasionally exquisite tones of colour and freshness of feeling. Nor does his appreciation stop at mere technical excellences. Ruskin's truer discernment breaks out when he says: "I believe that with the name of Richard Wilson the history of sincere landscape art, founded on a meditative love of Nature, begins for England."

There, undoubtedly, is the true note of criticism. It

Sweetness and Grandeur

is a note which, though sometimes subdued, has never failed to be heard. Wilson's originality and power and grandeur have all along been recognized. I think, indeed, they have been recognized to his detriment. They have attracted almost all the admiring attention that has ever been paid to him, and it is for this reason that his gentler and sweeter qualities, his rare delicacy and modesty, have remained almost unnoticed. Yet, seeing the restrictions which must now necessarily beset his memory, it is much to have this constant, if limited, testimony to him. Whatever there may be in him that must remain under-estimated, there will at least always be that in him which will not be over-estimated. His originality has never been better appreciated by anybody than by one of the earliest and now obscurest of writers about him. This is Wright of Norwood. The following passage in his *Life of Wilson* could not be better:—"Like every other candidate for fame in a similar pursuit, possessed of that enthusiasm and unwearied application by which alone the difficulties of the art are to be overcome, Wilson, we may be well assured, omitted no opportunity of forming his taste by the study of the best pictures of all the various painters of landscape within his reach; from these he naturally formed his own conception of what was

*The True
Note*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

fine ; and thus, unfettered by the rules or the manner of any particular master, he gradually prepared himself to adopt a style entirely his own."

It is Wright's merit to have recognized not only that Wilson was entirely original, but that the style which he made his own contained within it the elements of a number of other styles. *Entirely Original* Wilson, like Poussin, but in a very much truer sense than he, was a "learned" painter. Not only was he acquainted with the ancient classics, but his love of classical subjects was inspired by sympathy as well as knowledge. Knowledge with him, in fact, went hand in hand with sympathy. To know Nature it was necessary first to sympathize with her, and to sympathize with her it was also necessary to know her. The response he won from Nature was as profound and intimate as his task in winning it was long and difficult. His great landscape period was the result of years of study, and in order to study Nature he studied the works of other artists who had sought to study her before him. "Study," said Sir Joshua Reynolds, "consists in learning to see Nature, and may be entitled the art of using other men's minds." Wilson, in painting, made the same reverent use of other men's minds as, in poetry, was made by Milton. The naturalistic references in Milton's poems have been said

Own Point of View

to be those of a bookman rather than those of a naturalist: the author of *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas* especially has been charged with seeing Nature, not indeed as Pope saw her, through the drawing-room window and with the classical dictionary open before him, but through his study window and with Virgil's and Spenser's poems present at least to his memory if not to his eyesight. But if a poet borrows words from other writers about outward nature, it is because he feels in himself, and shares to the full, the personal sympathy with her which their words convey to him. More, as a reverent lover of Nature, he knows too well the irreverence of rejecting her, in whatever way she has revealed herself, whether to others for him or to himself directly. He is a humble follower of her with the rest of her suitors, and must accept as part of her the smiles and favours she has for others as well as those she reserves specially for him. The love of Nature, in fact, implies a community of interest in her and of knowledge of her; and it is never more truly personal to the individual lover than when he recognizes that the delight he has in her has been perceived by others, though on Nature's part it was perhaps never revealed to them so much as to him. The interpreter of Nature, be he poet or painter, must have due regard to the interpretations of his fellow poets

Richard Wilson, R.A.

or painters. In Milton any schoolboy can detect reminiscences of Virgil and Horace, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Du Bartas, and of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*; and in the same way the veriest tyro in Art criticism can say with justice that Wilson had studied the Poussins, Claude, and Rosa, while perhaps it requires an eye but very little more experienced to observe here and there the influence of Rembrandt, of De Hooze and Cuyp, and—just occasionally—Berchem. But to call the painter of “Niobe” the English Claude—or the English anybody—is not more ridiculous than to say the same thing of Turner. The juxtaposition of the Claude and the Turner landscapes in the National Gallery in London points no stronger contrast than that noted long ago in a passage attributed to Peter Pindar, between the same foreign Master and Turner’s English predecessor. Dr. Wolcot, the author of the famous Peter-Pindarics addressed to the Academicians, has, in addition to his poetical eulogy of Wilson, the following prose criticism:—

“Wilson has been called the English Claude; but how unjustly, so totally different their style.
“*The English Claude*” . . . Claude sometimes painted grand scenes, but without a mind of grandeur; Wilson, on the contrary, could infuse a grandeur into the meanest objects; Claude when he drew on the bank



"River Scene, with Castle."



Sublimity and Simplicity

of his own ideas was a mere *castrato* in the art: witness his 'Landing of Aeneas in Italy.' . . . Wilson, on the contrary, was a Hercules. When his subject was grand, he clothed it with thunder; witness his 'Celadon and Amelia,' his 'Niobe.'" And the writer of this kind of criticism is all the better equipped for writing it by his ability to appreciate not only the qualities herein referred to, but by his insight into the genius of Wilson considered in its entirety. Wilson's gentler qualities do not escape him. "His subjects," he writes, "were the selections of taste; and whether of the simple, the elegant, or the sublime, they were treated with equal felicity. Indeed, he possessed that versatility of power as to be one minute an eagle, sweeping the heavens, and the next a wren, twittering a simple note on the humble thorn."

Into a style like this, with such widely varied elements, it was inevitable that suggestions caught from the style of many Masters should be introduced; but they are never rightly to be spoken of except as suggestions, not as adaptations, imitations, or actual resemblances.

What Wilson did, in fact, was to develop the tradition of Rosa, Claude, and the Poussins, deepen it and make it his own. And he made it his own just at the point at which, on Ruskin's erroneous view of the matter, his

Richard Wilson, R.A.

originality would seem to have been "overpowered" and his own native talent corrupted. It was at Rome that his genius found its first adequate expression. Ruskin's description of the scenery in the surrounding district reveals the source and secret of Wilson's greatness, and not, as Ruskin supposes, a cause of failure. It is a district, certainly, of which it might well have been written, regarding its influence on any other painters than Richard Wilson and his predecessors, that it exhibits "no pure or healthy nature, but a diseased and overgrown flora among half-developed volcanic rocks, loose calcareous concretions, and mouldering wrecks of buildings"; and it may most certainly be added that its spirit might be conceived to be "especially opposed to the natural tone of the English mind." Of the English mind,—Yes, undoubtedly; but of the Celtic mind, the mind of Richard Wilson,—No. Wilson was not, in the sense in which Ruskin was speaking, an Englishman. To regard him as such is to be under a misconception not dissimilar to Sir Joshua Reynolds's error, in supposing that Wilson had not a mind, like that of Poussin, "naturalized in antiquity."

It was because Wilson's mind was naturalized in antiquity that he depicted Italy so truly. His innate sympathy as a Welshman, and as the scion of a family

Generalization

of ancient name and fame, with all that belonged to the past and that made the past immortal, enabled him to interpret the spirit of these loose calcareous concretions and these mouldering wrecks of buildings in the Campagna di Roma more truly than Poussin. As Allan Cunningham observed, none ever excelled him in depicting the general character of Italy. By representing this general character Wilson arrives invariably at the true grandeur of the scenery. His characteristic quality is undoubtedly breadth. His Italian landscapes are indeed to be considered as compositions rather than imitative or portrait scenes; but the general truth which resides in them is, in spite of their conventionalism and occasionally rigid formalism, more impressive far than even the most exquisite evidences afforded by his English pieces of a sense for local tone and local colouring. There are one or two, it is true, even among his Italian landscapes—notably the view of “La Riccia,” which was in the Ford Collection—showing an unusual care and finish in the details; but while it is impossible to ignore that in some of Wilson’s landscapes there is this occasional minuteness, it is undeniable that the highest truth he arrives at is invariably reached by a process not of elaboration and finish, but of broad generalization. On this point Redgrave is worth quoting. “Does not,

*Steeped
in
Antiquity*

Richard Wilson, R.A.

then," he asks, "the very scale of an artist's work imply generalization, which, be it remembered, does not mean an attempt to fuse the specific character of any two or more objects into one, but the omission of those details the representation of which, mean in themselves, becomes absolutely impossible on the reduced scale of the picture? No one will doubt that he who has thoroughly studied the details of the form, will give the general impression of it more truly from that study; but mean and literal imitation certainly degrades Art as much as simple, broad, and general treatment ennobles it."

Wilson ennobled, by this general treatment, nearly all that he touched in landscape. There is none of his pictures from which this quality of breadth *Ennobling Treatment* is wholly absent. Some, indeed, are of less impressive unity than others; but in all alike, whether one bear in mind and feel—as one must feel—the truth of Fuseli's description of his "effects of dewy verdure and of silent evening lights," or prefer, equally truthfully, that other aspect of his genius in which he seemed allied to terror, bustle, and convulsion in his feeling for Nature—whether one prefer, in short, his quiet English sketches or his grand Italian compositions—one must equally recognize the same spirit of Art in him. It is a spirit which informs

Foregrounds

and ennobles everything, however diversified its manifestations.

Wilson ennobled scenery because he had a mind of nobility. Few painters have combined such dignity with such perfect simplicity. And when one speaks of the union of these two qualities in his paintings one enters at once upon what has been all along fairly common ground of criticism. The last word on this aspect of Wilson's genius seems to be that of Hoppner, who, in an article in the *Quarterly*, remarks, "We recall no painter who with so much originality of manner united such truth and grandeur of expression."

It is this article of Hoppner's, too, which provides the answer of the sanest criticism to a strange misconception of one of Wilson's technical excellencies. Even among critics who have dwelt on Wilson's fine perspective, seen in his handling of distances, and on the impressive unity of most of his works, there has been a disposition to concentrate criticism on a few of his foregrounds. It was Edward Edwardes who set the tradition of this kind of criticism; it was Hoppner who shattered it. "Although," he writes in this *Quarterly* article, "in the opinion of Mr. Edwardes his pictures are incomplete, we feel assured that while he was in possession of his full powers negligence was in no degree the

Richard Wilson, R.A.

cause of this imaginary defect, but that every touch of his pencil was directed by a principle that required the subserviency of particular parts to the full establishment of the whole. In Wilson's landscapes even the figures are rendered accessory to the general effect, while in the works of other Masters men and women are introduced apparently to keep the scene alive, though in other respects they seem to be, as sometimes in Nature, rather ornamental than useful."

Wilson's work was, it must be admitted, very unequal; and, of course, neither Hoppner nor any one else who has written in defence of it can have overlooked the fact. But it is surely just to look not to an artist's worst but his best productions; and that, it seems, is just what the critics who have followed Edward Edwards in this particular criticism have invariably failed to do.

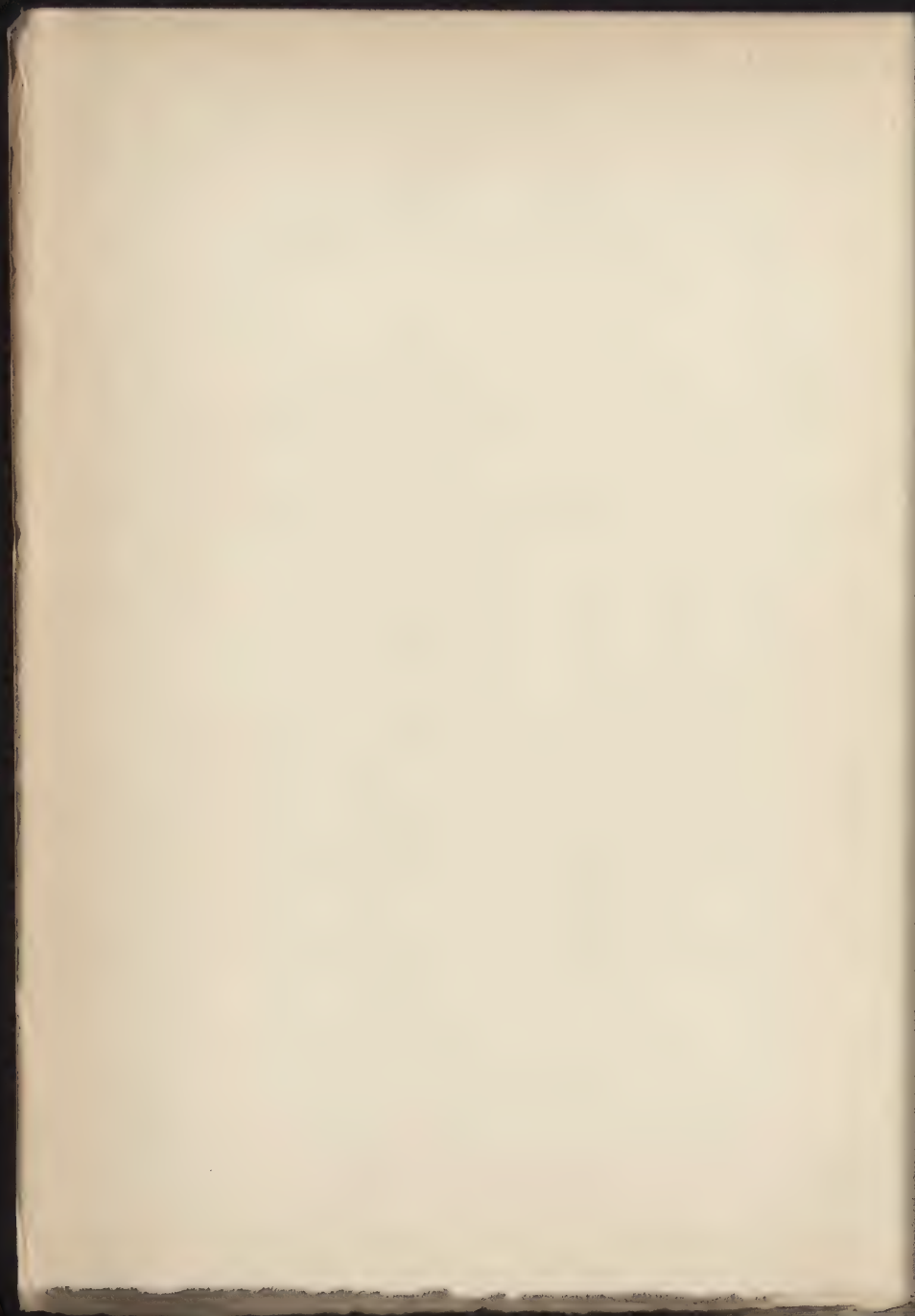
If there is one tradition in criticism, however, which has done its worst for Wilson, it is but the foil to another which has done its best. British landscape-painters have held none of their number in higher esteem than they have held him. Of their many tributes to his memory, let that of Constable be final: "Poor Wilson! Think of his fate, think of his magnificence!"—there is no truer way of thinking of Wilson than that. But, thinking

*The Final
Tribute*

Setting Sun

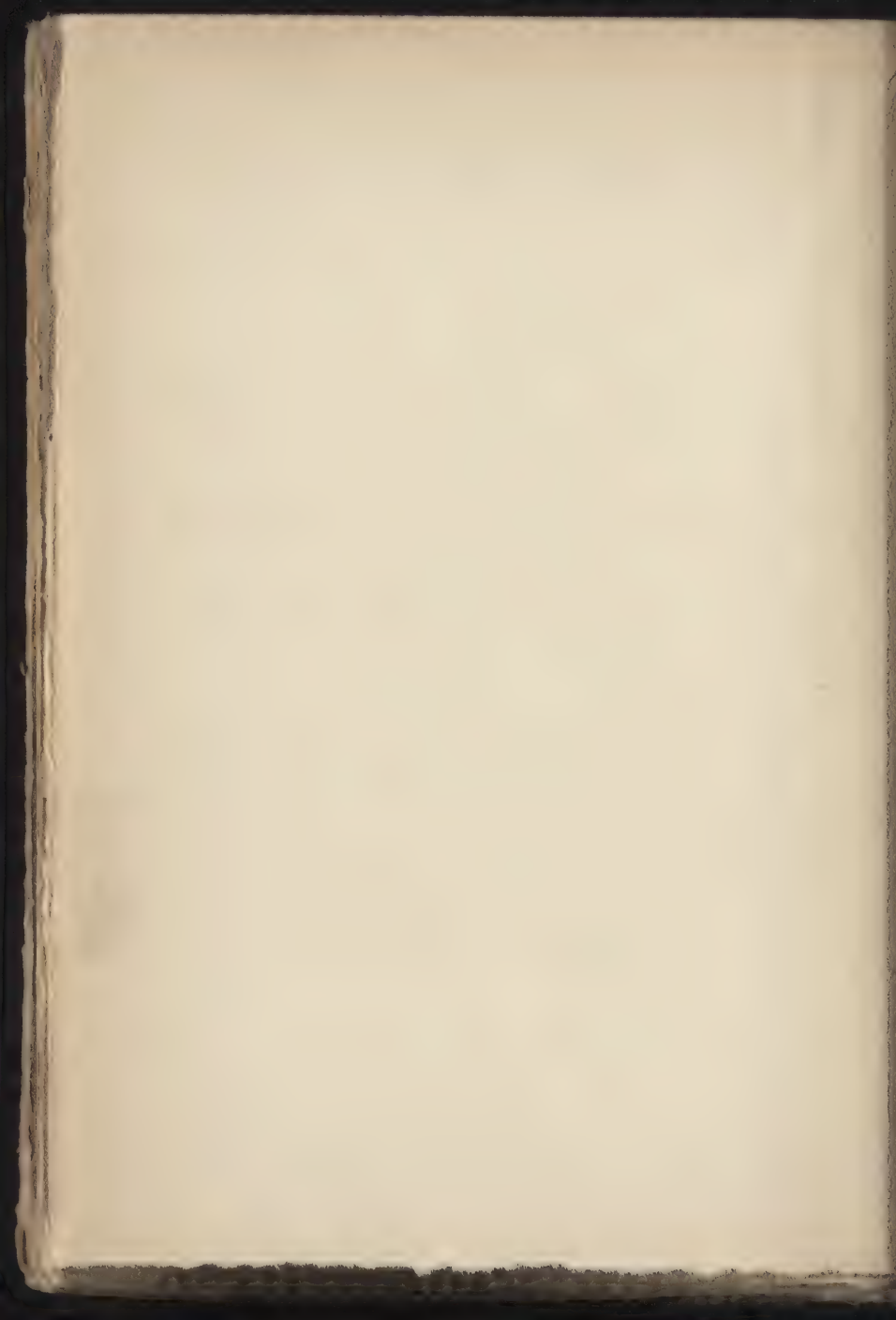
thus, one cannot but add with this most feeling admirer that after all "the mind loses its dignity less in adversity than in prosperity." Much might be made, as already indicated in this chapter, of a comparison of Wilson with Milton, but of this the words of Constable are, in nothing so much as their simplicity, sufficiently, eloquent. Wilson was one of those appointed to show the world the hidden stores and beauties of Nature. He is now walking "arm in arm with Milton and Linnæus." His fate and fame are not unrelated to one another. Adversity gave him dignity; dignity informs his paintings. As one thinks of some typical Wilson landscape—suggested, perhaps, among the romantic scenery of Italy—large and free in its conception, rich but quiet, fresh yet warm in its colouring, and withal solemn in the sentiment which gives life and soul to it—one repeats almost involuntarily the words of the poet of Nature:—

The clouds that gather round the setting sun,
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality.



Appendices.

- I. AUTHORITIES CONSULTED.
- II. WILSON'S PICTURES IN PUBLIC GALLERIES.
- III. WILSON'S PICTURES IN THE AUCTION-ROOM.
- IV. REPRODUCTIONS OF WILSON'S PICTURES.



Appendix I.

Authorities Consulted.

ANYTHING like a bibliography of Wilson is out of the question. No single book devoted exclusively to him and his art has so far appeared. In 1824 Thomas Wright, of Norwood, published *Some Account of the Life of Richard Wilson, R.A.*, but the work is in two parts, and only one of these can be called in any direct sense a biography or a criticism. The second part deals with a number and variety of observations on Art and Nature which have no immediate relation to the title-subject. Such as the work is, however, it remains to-day—though long since out of print—the only attempt that we have, in the form of a book, to collect the available materials for a life of Wilson, and to combine with the narrative based upon them some appreciation of his art, drawn partly from past and contemporary opinion, but in no inconsiderable measure also from direct acquaintance with the several Wilson landscapes which the author had in his possession. But most of the facts of Wilson's life recorded by Wright had been already embodied by Allan Cunningham in his *Lives of British Painters*, and before that by Edward Edwards in his *Anecdotes*. Then there are, of course, Redgrave's and Bryan's Dictionaries and other works, all good in their way, but necessarily limited, in their treatment of Wilson, by their very scope as dictionaries. References to Wilson in the literature of his own and the succeeding century are very limited, but special mention must be made here of the *Book for a Rainy Day*, by J. T. Smith, the author of *Nollekens and his Times*; and amongst forgotten remains relating more or less to the same fascinating period I may make passing reference to

Richard Wilson, R.A.

Wine and Walnuts, and *Carey's Thoughts*, mentioned in this volume. I have taken occasion, too, to refer, while dealing with the relationship of Wilson and Gainsborough, to a passage in Sir W. Armstrong's *Gainsborough*. Amongst periodicals, I have found notices of Wilson here and there in back numbers of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *Quarterly*, and, in particular, the volume of the *Art Journal* for 1890.

Reproductions of Wilson's pictures and drawings published in book form include:—*Twelve Original Views in Italy*, etched by Farrington, Rooker, and others (J. & J. Boydell, 1776); *Thirty-seven Sketches and Designs in Crayon*, by Richard Wilson, R.A. (London: William Tegg, 1863); *Studies and Designs by Richard Wilson: done at Rome in 1752*; *Etchings from the Works of Wilson in the Ford Collection*, by Thomas Hastings.

II.

Wilson's Pictures in Public Galleries.

A—LANDSCAPES.

The National Gallery, London.

Room XVIII.

304—Italy: Lake Avernus.

Room XIX.

267—River Scene.

303—View in Italy.

1071—A Rocky River Scene.

302—View in Italy.

1064—On the River Wye.

108—Ruins of the Villa of Mæcnas.

110—Niobe.

1779—River Scene, with Ruins.

Room XX.

301—View in Italy.

1290—Landscape, with Figures.

South Kensington.

Landscape, with River and Ruins.

Landscape: Evening; River Scene, with Castle.

Italian Landscape, with Ruined Building and Group
of Venus, Adonis, and Cupids.

Richard Wilson, R.A.

Landscape Composition, with Bay and Ruined Buildings; dancing figures in foreground and mountains in distance.

Italian River Scene, with Figures.

Dulwich Gallery.

Mæcenas' Villa.

Edinburgh National Gallery.

Italian Landscape.

River Scene, with Figures.

Glasgow Gallery.

Sketch for a Landscape.

View near Tivoli.

Lake of Como.

Scene on an English River.

The Convent: Twilight.

Landscape, with Figures.

Dublin National Gallery.

A Landscape.

Manchester Corporation Art Gallery.

Snowdon.

B—PORTRAITS.

National Portrait Gallery, London.

Room XXXIII.

The two Young Princes (George III. and the Duke of York), with their Tutor, Dr. Ayscough.

Room XVII.

Portrait of himself.

Appendix II.

The Royal Academy, London.

Diploma Gallery.

Portrait of himself.

The Gibson Gallery.

J. H. Mortimer, standing in a landscape.

The Painted Hall, Greenwich.

Portrait of Admiral Smith (known as "Tom of Ten Thousand").

Bristol Academy of Fine Arts.

Portrait of himself.

[Among pictures by Wilson in private galleries there is a portrait by him of the famous actress "Peg Woffington" in the possession of the Garrick Club, London. It formerly belonged to the actor Charles Mathews.]

III.

Wilson's Pictures in the Auction-room.

INTEREST in the following list is twofold. While as a record of prices it tells a pathetic story, another consideration suggested by it, as a mere enumeration of such paintings by Wilson as have from time to time made their appearance at auction, is the amount, variety, and inequality of his work. It is doubtful if every landscape that has been attributed to him was really by him. Many supposed to be by him were probably at the best no more than touched by him; being in the first place, perhaps, the work of his pupils, Farrington, Hodges, or others of lesser note than they. Even allowing, however, that a goodly number of "Wilsons" were, in their main parts at least, by other hands than his, the total output of his work to which no doubt attaches would appear to have been enormous. This list does not pretend to be anything more than an indication of it. It is by no means exhaustive, being compiled only from the couple of volumes entitled *Records of Christie's*, from the sale catalogues of King Street, and from Redford's *Art Sales*.

In addition to paintings, a number of sketches by Wilson have appeared at auction. These are interesting, quite apart from the degrees of skill represented by them and the different media employed, as showing his versatility as regards the subjects selected. The objects on which Wilson employed his pencil are often very different from those in the representation of which he resorted to the grander medium of brush and palette. His pencil drawings of plants in particular are done with rare skill and delicacy. Occasionally Wilson used black and white chalk, and at least one example of work in Indian ink and two in water-colour are attributed to him. A remarkable example of his water-colour work is the picture reproduced in this volume, entitled "Solitude," in the possession of Mr. James Orrock, R.I.

Appendix III.

SUBJECT.	PRICE.	DATE OF SALE.	REMARKS.
View on the Arno, 54" x 81"	1,800 gns.	July 3, 1875	From Lord de Tabley's sale, 1827, where it realized 470 guineas.
Distant View of Rome: Sunset, 53" x 38"	1000 "	July 8, 1882	—
Death of Niobe's Children	800 "	—	Duke of Gloucester's sale. The celebrated <i>chef d'œuvre</i> engraved by Woollett.
Lake Scene, 33" x 42"	700 "	April 14, 17, 23, 24, 1875	—
View on the Arno, 39" x 40"	620 "	June 15, 1895	Price sale.
A View of Sion House and the Thames from Kew, with figures in the foreground, 36" x 54"	530 "	1899	From Ford Collection, 1878.
Landscape with River, between Dolgelly and Barmouth: Cader Idris in the distance, 36" x 54"	500 "	1883	—
View on the Arno	470 "	1827	—
Niobe	430 "	1876	Wynn Ellis sale.
Apollo and the Seasons, 41" x 51"	405 "	1886	—
Roman Ruins, with waterfall	£400	1840	—
Sion House	380 gns.	1894	—

Richard Wilson, R.A.

SUBJECT.	PRICE.	DATE OF SALE.	REMARKS.
View on the River Mawddach, between Dolgelly and Bar-mouth: Cader Idris in the distance: Evening, 35" x 53"	380 gns.	1898	—
Lake Nemi, 24' x 30'	£331	1874	At the Grosvenor Gallery 1889. Sold for 200 guineas 1902.
View on the Dee, with richly wooded banks and two figures	300 "	1892	Dudley sale, from Coningham College. Sold in 1849 for 215 guineas.
Lake Scene near Coast, 27" x 35"	280 "	1878	—
A Hilly Landscape: Evening effect; in the foreground a man, a woman, and a dog, 38" x 43½"	280 "	1897	—
Sion House from Kew, 36" x 53"	270 "	April 6, 1878	—
River Scene: Italy, 16" x 21"	260 "	1878	—
River Scene, with ruined castle and angler, 67" x 63"	245 "	1901	—
An Italian River Scene, with castle buildings on a hill and anglers, 37" x 50"	210 "	July 15, 1899	—
Apollo and Diana slaying the Children of Niobe	205 "	March 31, 1810	Apparently one of the two duplicates of the picture in the National Gallery.
Minchenden House, Southgate, with extensive landscape and water, figures in the foreground	195 "	Sept. 14, 1848	Stowe sale.

Appendix III.

Landscape with Phaeton	185 gns.	March 22 and 23, 1803	Formerly belonging to the Duke of Bridgewater. Engraved by Woollett.
Meleager (rough)	170 "	June 2 and 3, 1848	—
River Scenery with Temple, 24" x 9"	160 "	April 6, 1878	From Mr. James Orrock's collection.
Grand view of Tivoli, 69" x 67"	150 "	1904	—
English Lake, with buildings and figures	150 "	1902	—
Landscape, with lake and ruins of a castle, 16" x 22½"	140 "	1899	—
Caernarvon Castle, with peasant and cattle	110 "	1848	—
L'Anconetta on the Lagunes, with a procession of monks to a chapel, with figures and boats in the foreground, 18½" x 25½"	100 "	1896	Exhibited at Leeds 1868, and at British Institution. The same subject realized exactly the same price in 1901.
Portrait of Sir E. Lloyd	90 "	1905	—
Cader Idris, 34" x 41"	80 "	1898	—
A River Scene	75 "	1896	—
Classical River Scene, with ruined buildings and figures	58 "	1895	—
An Upright Landscape, with river and ruined castle, 66" x 47"	56 "	1898	—
A Classical Landscape, distant view of a town seen across a river which winds, 18½" x 22"	52 "	1899	Exhibited at Burlington House 1887.
A Lake Scene	50 "	1897	—
A Classical River Scene, with Philosopher, 24" x 30"	45 "	1896	Exhibited at Leeds 1868.

Richard Wilson, R.A.

SUBJECT.	PRICE.	DATE OF SALE.	REMARKS.
A Winding River, with buildings and figures, 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ "	38 gns.	1895	—
Cicero at his Villa, 12" x 20"	38 "	1896	A sketch for the engraved subject. Exhibited Leeds 1868, and at British Institution.
A Rocky River Scene, a horse-man in the foreground and monks before a cross on a height, 20" x 25"	35 "	1896	—
Classical Landscape with ruins and figures	35 "	1895	—
A Rocky River Scene, with Anglers, 36" x 53"	31 "	1897	—
A View in Italy, with ruins and figures, 17" x 21"	30 "	1896	—
The Crater of Cader Idris, 18" x 27"	30 "	1899	—
A River Scene, with ruin and figure	28 "	1898	—
Rocky River Scene, with figures, 12" x 16"	28 "	1895	—
Italian River Scene, with castle on a rocky height, a group of figures in the foreground, 28" x 36"	27 "	1896	—
A Collection of Landscape Views, after R. Wilson	£25 10s.	1898	—

Appendix III.

Lake Avernus	1898	Exhibited at Leeds 1868, and also at the British Institution.
Italian River Scene, with the Temple of Clitumnus and ruins, two figures and cows in the foreground, $18\frac{3}{4}'' \times 25\frac{3}{4}''$	1896	
An Upright Landscape, with river and ruined castle, $66'' \times 47''$	1897	
An Italian Lake Scene, with temple, anglers, and buildings	1897	
A Landscape, with a bridge, figures, and sheep	1898	Exhibited at the Scottish National Gallery 1883
A Town on a River, with shipping and figures	1899	
A Composition, with ruins and figures	1896	
Thames at Kew	1896	
A River Scene, with peasant woman and children, $27\frac{1}{2}'' \times 35\frac{1}{2}''$	1898	
A River Scene, with farm buildings	1896	
A River Scene, with buildings and figures, $18\frac{1}{2}'' \times 24\frac{1}{2}''$	1897	
A River Scene, with ruins and figures, $25'' \times 31''$	1899	
Italian Drovers, with sheep in a mountainous landscape	1897	
A River Scene, with classical figures	1896	
The Discovery of Perdita	1896	

22 gns.
20 "
20 "
20 "
20 "
20 "
£19 8s. 6d.
18 gns.
18 "
16 "
16 "
15 "
15 "
14 "
£14 3s. 6d.

Richard Wilson, R.A.

SUBJECT.	PRICE.	DATE OF SALE.	REMARKS.
An Italian Lake Scene, with a convent on a height and two monks in the foreground, 16" x 21"	12 gns.	1897	—
An Italian Landscape	12 "	1897	—
A View near Rome, with a villa on a height, figures in the foreground, 13½" x 16½"	11 "	1897	From the collection of the post Rogers.
A River Scene, with peasants	10 "	1896	—
View of Fonthill, Wiltshire	10 "	1897	—
An Italian Landscape, with ruined arches and figures	10 "	1897	—

IV.

Reproductions of Wilson's Pictures.

THERE is no lack of engravings and etchings of Wilson's works. The skill and frequency with which his best-known landscapes and subject-pictures have been reproduced are indeed not the least of the artistic tributes which have all along been paid to his genius. Some of the best engravers of his time employed their art in giving back, as nearly as may be, through another medium, the many excellences of his canvases; and how successful they sometimes were it was given to one of them to know in very agreeable fashion. It is said of Woollett that on being commissioned by a noble patron of Wilson's to engrave one of his landscapes he accomplished the task so completely to the connoisseur's satisfaction that the reward agreed upon was promptly doubled.

The following list includes the best-known engravings and etchings:—

PICTURE.	ENGRAVER.	DATE OF ENGRAVING.
Phaeton	Woollett	1763
Speculum Dianæ	Wood	1764
View of Rome from the Villa Madonna	W. Byrne	1765
View of the Campagna	W. Byrne	1765
Ceyx and Alcyone	Woollett	1769
Fall of Niagara	W. Byrne	1774

Richard Wilson, R.A.

PICTURE.	ENGRAVER.	DATE OF ENGRAVING.
Celadon and Amelia	Browne and Woollett	1776
Apollo and the Seasons	Woollett and Pouncy	1777
Meleager and Atalanta—figures by Mortimer	Woollett and Pouncy	1777
Solitude	Woollett and Ellis	1778
Cicero at his Villa	Woollett and Ellis	1778
Niobe	Woollett	—
Snowdon	Woollett	—
Cader Idris and Kilgarron	—	—

The following were published in 1776 by J. & J. Boydell, under the title of *Twelve Original Views in Italy*.—

PICTURE.	ENGRAVER.
Paths of Diocletian	James Gandon.
Temple of Peace	Rooker.
Bridge of Augustus at Rimini	Farrington.
Torre delle Grotte, near Naples	Hodges.
Castle of Ischia	Gandon.
Banks of the Tiber	Gandon.
In the Strada Nomentana	Farrington.
Circus of Caracalla	E. Rooker.
Temple of Romulus and Remus	Gandon.
Villa of Mæcenas at Tivoli	M. Rooker.
Pompey's Bridge at Terni	Gandon.
In the Villa Adriana	M. Rooker.

An interesting set of topographical prints of home scenery was the collection of *Six Views in Wales, after Wilson*, by Byrne and Rooker.

The most considerable collection of etchings of Wilson's landscapes is that of Thomas Hastings, referred to in the text of this volume.

Index.

- ABEL, C. F., portrait of, 73
 Academy, Royal, 65, 66, 92, 127,
 128, 133, 135
 — Diploma picture, 98
 — Exhibition, 90
 Alps, 25
 "Apollo and the Seasons," 102
 Architectural accessories, 105, 106,
 107, 108
 "Arno, The," 116, 117
 "Arno, View on the," 116, 117,
 124, 141
 Arnold, Matthew, quoted, 3, 130,
 150
 Art and Crafts, 63
 Art, apprenticeship, 62
 — as subjective, 14
 — early bent for, 5, 69
 — independence of, 1, 17
 — nationality in, 1, 2, 129, 130
 Ayscough, Dr., 82

 BARRET, 135, 145, 155, 157
 Beaumont, Sir George, 159, 171
 Beechey, Sir William, 125, 154,
 157, 158
 Berkeley, quoted, 51
 Blake, William, 24
 Bridgewater, Duke of, 90, 93
 British School, 52, 63, 131, 132,
 133
 Britton's *Fine Arts*, 76, 87, 99
 Browning, Mrs., quoted, 59

 Bute, Lord, Wilson's dispute with,
 153
 Byrne (engraver), 118

 CALLCOTT, Sir A. W., 123, 124
 Camden, Lord Chancellor, 35, 36
 Campagna, The, 100, 109, 116,
 156, 179
 "— View of," 118
Carey's Thoughts, 106, 107, 119
 "Celadon and Amelia," 90, 121,
 177
 Celtic influence, 3
 — temperament, 19, 20
 Celtism, spirit of, 30
 Celts, 3
 "Ceyx and Alcyone," 32, 121
 Chamberlin, 129
 Chateaubriand, 25
 Claude, 19, 48, 107, 111, 172, 174,
 176, 177
 "— The English," 176, 177
 Colomendie, 39, 41, 160
 Constable, John, 26
 — his tribute to Wilson, 182,
 183
 — on "The Art," 120
 Cosway (miniaturist), 137
 Cotes, Francis, 127, 129
 Covent Garden, 64, 67, 139
 Cox, David, 40
 Cunningham, Allan, 30, 70, 119,
 121, 144, 179

Richard Wilson, R.A.

- DANCE, Nat., 129
 Dartmouth, Lord, 99
 "Dover, View of," 91, 113
- EASTLAKE, Sir Charles, 57
 Edwardes, Edward, 67, 148, 149, 181, 182
 Egwest, 28, 29, 41
- Faire vivre*, 55
 Farrington, 123
 Father of English landscape, 7, 20, 23, 71, 87, 132, 161
 Ford Collection, 88, 115, 116, 142, 179
 Fuseli on Wilson, 111, 181
- GAINSBOROUGH, 9, 26, 30, 42, 47, 48, 52, 55, 56, 71, 80, 129
 Georges, The, 43, 50, 55, 153, 154
 George III., 48, 73, 82
 Géricault, 56
 "Gipsies, The," 115
 Glendower's country, 27, 41
 Godolf Castle, Wilson's sketch of, 143
- HASTINGS, Thomas (etcher), 88, 117, 159
 Haydon, B. R., 59
 Hayman, 65, 136, 137
 Hazlitt quoted, 50
 Hogarth, William, 42, 64, 97, 127, 134, 141
 Holcroft (dramatist), 125
 Hoppner on Wilson, 181
 Hounslow Heath, 14, 42
- IDEAL, the, 60
 Individualization, 52
 Individualism, effect of, 49, 51, 53
 Italian "Idealism" in Claude and Poussin, 86
- Italian "mannerists," 86
 Italy, 17, 19, 20, 31
 — influence of, 85, 86
 — journey to, 88, 89, 90
 — study in, 20, 77, 86, 94, 95
- KNELLER, Sir Godfrey, 64, 140, 157
- "LA RICCIA," 179
 Leeswood, 5, 36, 37
 Lely, Sir Peter, 139, 140
 Llanverres, North Wales, 125, 159
 Llywarch, Hên, 29
 Locke of Norbury, portrait, 73, 87, 88, 89
 "Loggerheads," 40
 London, debt of Art to, 44
 — Wilson's arrival in, 42, 61, 65, 66, 67
 — Wilson's return to, 113
- MACHYNLLETH, 29
 "Meleager," 74, 111
 Mengs, 66, 93, 96, 97
 — Taylor's copy of Wilson's portrait by, 98, 136
 Middiman (engraver), 99
 Miller, J. S. (engraver), 91
 Millet, 15
 "Mæcenat' Villa," 74, 93, 103
 Mold, 3, 4, 29, 39, 40, 41
 Mortimer, J. H., A.R.A. (portrait), 49, 74, 76, 77, 79, 80, 104, 122
 — career of, 74, 75
 Mountains, 24, 25, 26
- NAPLES, 99, 100
 "Narni, Vale of," 115
 Nature, interpretation of, 11
 — return to, 25
 Nemi, 95, 116, 118

Index

Niagara, 92
 "Niobe," 7, 22, 74, 95, 114, 151

OPIE on Wilson, 73, 74, 99
 Ossian, 22

PENEGOES, 4, 28, 33
 Pennant's *Tour in Wales*, 36
 "Peter Pindar," 159, 176
 Poussin, 19, 48, 100, 107, 111
 Prince of Wales and the Duke of
 York, 82, 83

REAL, the, 60
 Redgrave on "breadth," 180
 Rembrandt, 16, 60
 — his influence on Wilson, 137,
 176

Reynolds, Sir Joshua, 3, 9, 10, 42,
 47, 48, 80, 127, 129, 174
 — his relations with Wilson,
 152, 153, 170

Rockingham, Marquis of, 49
 Rome, 90, 93, 96, 114, 178
 " — Distant View of," 99
 " — from Villa Madonna," 118
 — Wilson's objective, 103, 112
 — influence of, 100, 109
 Romney, George, 117, 129
 Rosa, Salvator, 19, 48, 111, 172,
 176, 177
 Rousseau, 25
 Ruskin, John, 23, 71, 103, 108,
 109, 161, 164, 171, 177, 178

SANDBY, Paul, 123, 142, 143, 154
 Scenery, interpretation of, 10, 11,
 14, 15, 83, 92, 102, 179
 Shipley, William, 65
 Siddons, Mrs., 59
 "Sion House," 153

Smith, Admiral, "Tom of Ten
 Thousand," 49, 139
 — of Chichester, 134
 "Snowdon," 141
 Stevens, Alfred, 55, 56
 St. Martin's Lane Academy, 65

TAINE, 7
 Terni, 92
 Thames, View of, near Richmond,
 92, 141, 142
 Thompson, Willy (music-seller),
 138
 "Turk's Head, The," 136, 137
 Turner, J. M. W., 3, 16, 26
 — in Wilson's haunts, 24, 145,
 146

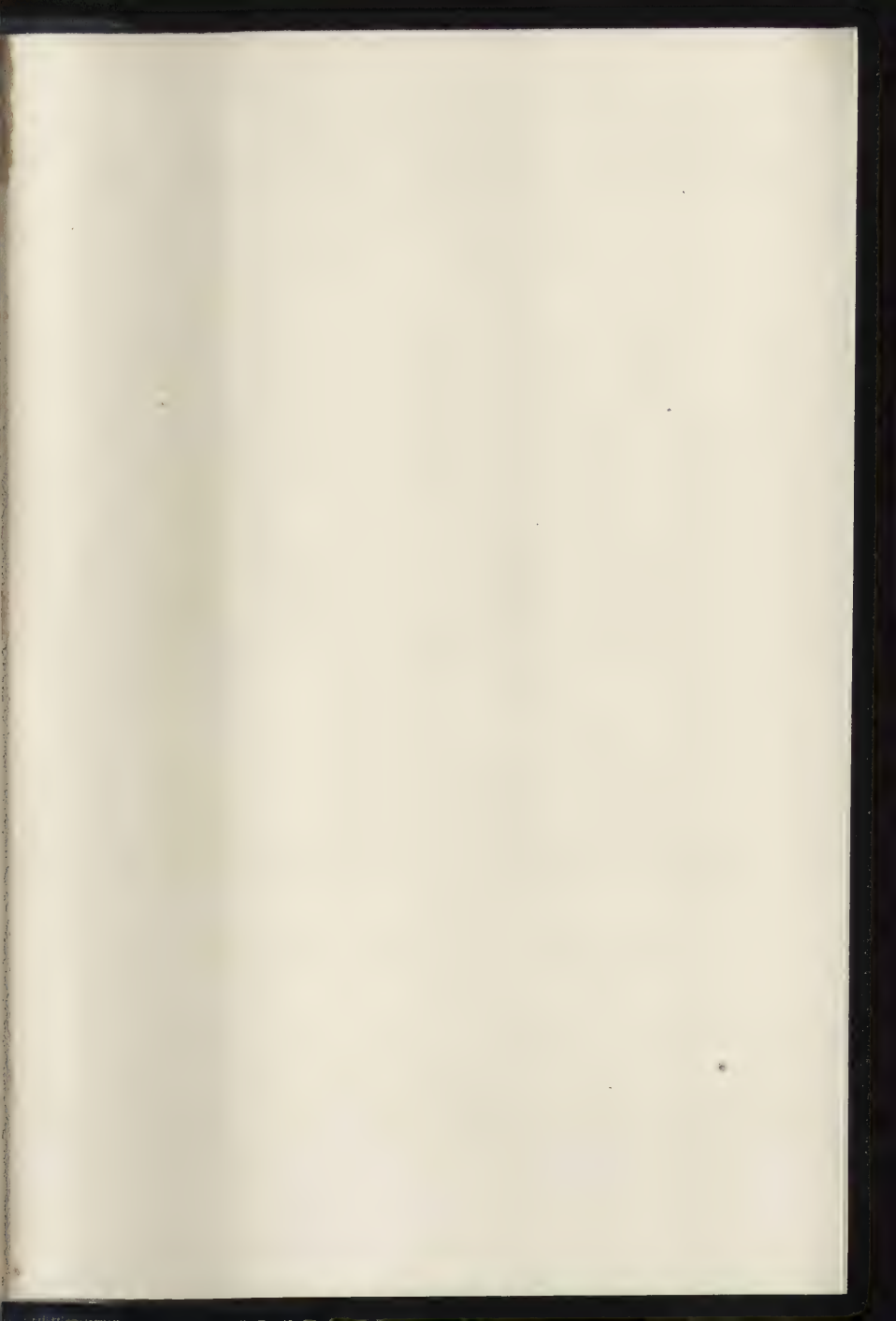
VENICE, 20, 87, 94
 Vernet, 93, 96, 99, 170

WALES, 6, 17
 — power of, 6
 — source of inspiration, 22, 48
 Waters, Wilson's delight in, 91, 92
 Whistler, J. A. McNeill, 1, 7, 8,
 56
 Wilson, Richard, birth of, 4
 — birthplace, 24
 — by himself, 66, 98, 122
 — Celt, 20, 130, 178
 — "classicism," 31
 — comparison with Gains-
 borough, 60, 71, 80, 81, 118,
 161-4
 — "composition," 130, 119
 — conventionalism, 83, 179
 — cousin, 35
 — death of, 159
 — family, 4
 — figures, 69, 77, 94, 95
 — his objectivity, 71, 81

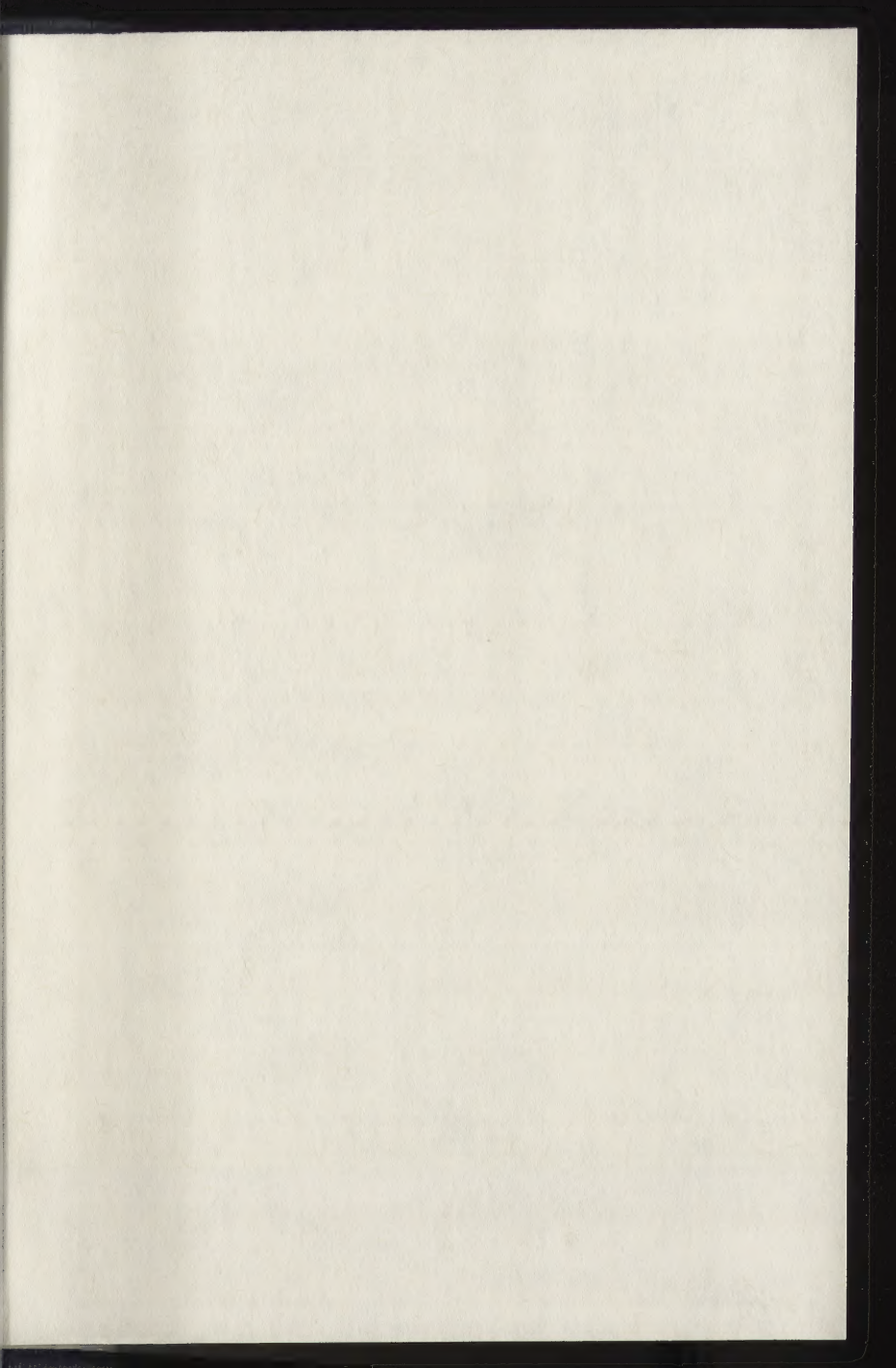
Index

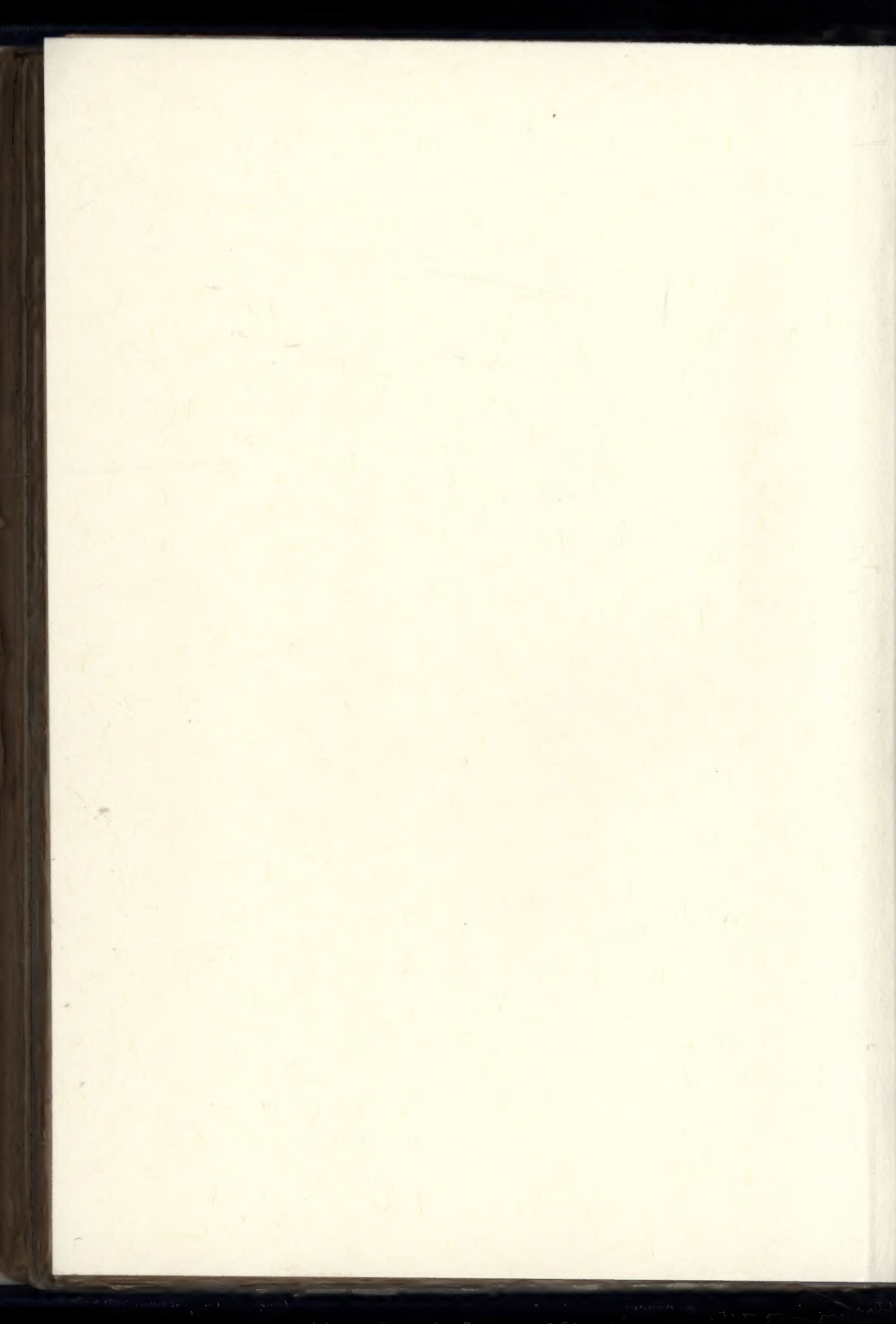
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|--|---|
| <p>Wilson, Richard, landscape, attitude to, 18, 70, 118, 119, 171-7</p> <p>— landscapist, 83, 129</p> <p>— librarian R.A., 138</p> <p>— London, arrival in, 42, 61, 65, 66, 67</p> <p>— love for Nature, 48</p> <p>— marine painter, 91</p> <p>— master of his Art, 83</p> <p>— memorial to, 34</p> <p>— Nature, attitude to, 21, 70, 71</p> <p>— pencil drawings, 95, 114</p> <p>— portraitist, 47, 72</p> <p>— portraits, limitations in, 49, 57, 58, 60, 72, 73, 81, 82, 83</p> <p>— portraits of, by Mengs, 66, 97, 98</p> <p>— portrait-painter, 81, 82, 83</p> <p>— realist, 80, 81, 83, 104</p> | <p>Wilson, Richard, student, 65, 66, 68</p> <p>"Woffington, Peg," 59</p> <p>Wood (engraver), 118</p> <p>Woollett (engraver), 144</p> <p>Wordsworth, 9, 15, 26, 341</p> <p>Wright of Derby, 156</p> <p>Wright, Thomas, of Norwood, 65, 67, 68, 69</p> <p>Wynne, Sir George, 36, 37, 38, 39, 67</p> <p>Wynnes of Leeswood, 5, 66, 36</p> <p>Wynnstay, 89</p> <p>YORK, Duke of, 82</p> <p>ZOFFANY, 158, 159</p> <p>Zuccarelli, 20, 21, 88, 89, 93, 94, 96, 97, 170</p> |
|--|---|

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